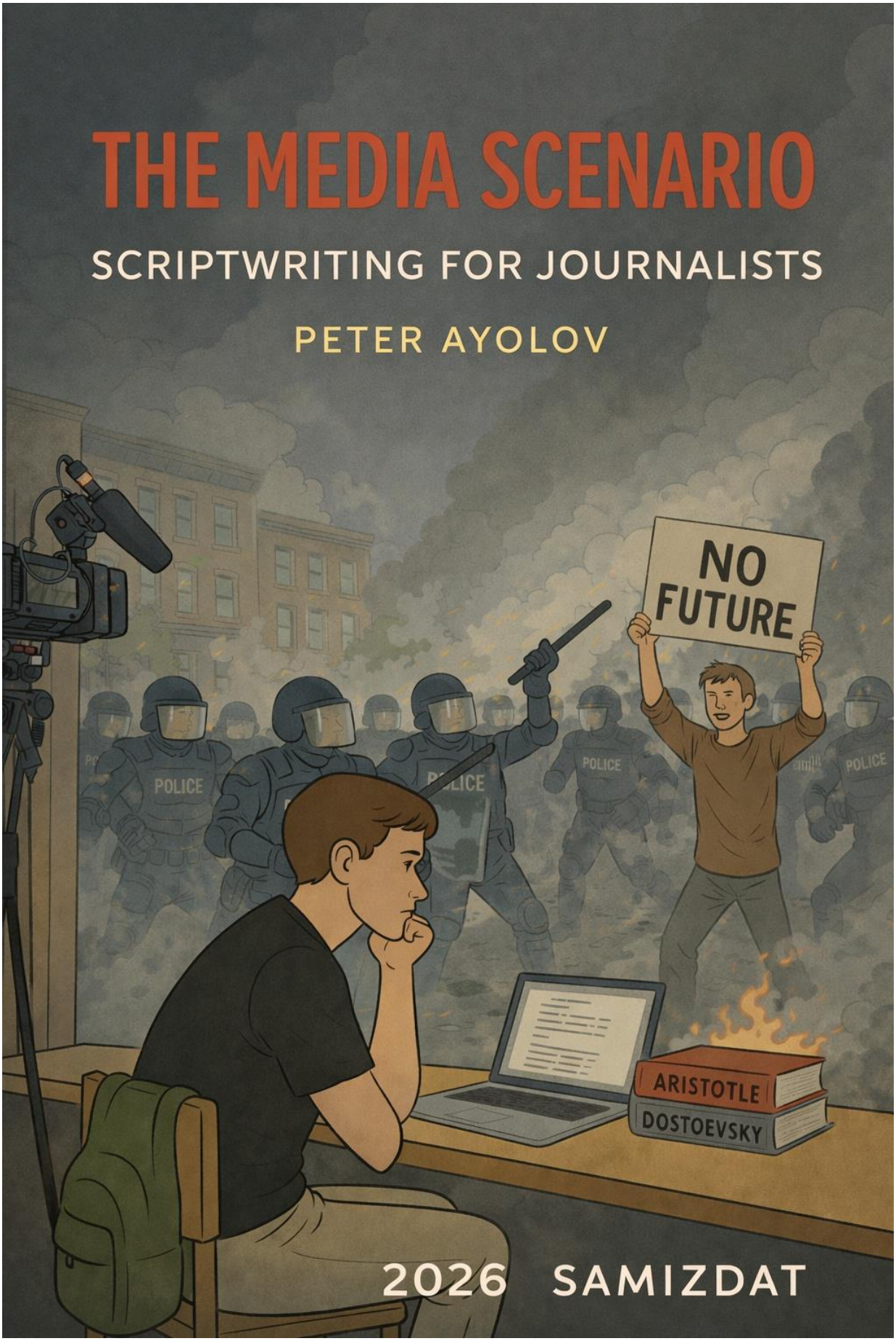
THE MEDIA SCENARIO
SCRIPTWRITING FOR JOURNALISTS
PETER AYOLOV
NO FUTURE
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2026 SAMIZDAT

The Media Scenario, Scriptwriting for Journalists

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2026

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Preface

The book The Media Scenario: Scriptwriting for Journalists is inspired by the work of Prof. Snezhana Popova, Media Narrative (Faculty of Journalism and Mass Communication, Sofia University, 2017), and may be read as its informal continuation. If Prof. Popova's book examines how media narrative constructs and tells a new reality, the present text describes how reality itself begins to unfold as a media scenario. The book is addressed to students of journalism and public relations, not in order to teach them how to write scripts for the media, but to help them recognise when they are being drawn into someone else's media scenario. In today's environment of digital communication and social networks, there is no longer a passive audience of viewers and readers of the 'media narrative'. Every person is a participant in the 'media scenario' and inevitably plays a particular role within it. This book is explicitly theoretical and advances a hypothesis that may only later be confirmed through empirical research. Such confirmation, however, can occur only after the theoretical framework of a new paradigm for studying media narratives in the twenty-first century has been established. What, in fact, is scriptwriting craft, and why is it especially important for journalists? What is the difference between a media narrative and a media scenario? What does media gameplay mean? Are the media not ultimately playful spaces in which people perform, through their own 'role-playing games', a role, a story, and an identity? Scriptwriting craft is not merely a technique for writing scripts, but a mode of thinking and a way of understanding the scriptural structures according to which not only the media, but life itself, unfolds. The analysis and deep understanding of the path and peripeteia of the hero in a narrative offer insight into the dynamics of human existence. Rather than becoming an instrument of manipulation and controlled effects, script-based thinking can offer a new sense of control without direct intervention, an awareness of one's own participation in the dramaturgy of everyday life. The classical linear model of communication proposed by Shannon and Weaver, according to which information is 'transmitted' from sender to receiver, is no longer applicable to contemporary media. Within the universe of script-based thinking, the issue is not the transport of a message, but the transformation of participants. The questions are no longer 'Who speaks? What is said? To whom? With what effect?', but rather 'How does a person change while speaking and acting?' The essence of the message gives way to experience, lived perception, and transformation. The truly pressing questions today are 'Who am I? Where am I? What am I doing, why, and with what effect?' Through contemporary media, countless narratives flow continuously, intersecting, intertwining, and mutually transforming one another. This movement is simultaneously an attempt at communication and a descent into a network of imagined connections with strangers. Today's media narrative is fragmented, often without a clear beginning and without an ending, sometimes even having forgotten its own source. In this sense, it is no longer merely a 'narrative', but something else, closer to a scenario or to gameplay, in which the plot unfolds in real time. This book does not offer a theory of narrative, nor a systematisation of the media, nor a textbook on screenwriting. It examines the transition from media narrative to media scenario, the way journalistic and public speech turn into dramaturgy in which everyone becomes a participant. The aim is to reveal the connection between narrative, scenario, and media as a shared space in which the role of the audience shifts from passivity to activity and interactivity. The media scenario is a transmedia phenomenon, composed of numerous micro-narratives without a clearly defined beginning or end. It allows the participation of 'players' on different levels, from professional journalists to ordinary users who, through posts, comments, and reactions, continue writing and replaying the plot. Within this complex structure, the scenario functions as a projection of social ideas and imagined identities. Journalistic narratives and scenarios form a particular layer within this dynamic, because they combine fact and fiction, information and

interpretation, reality and its staged representation. This book is the result of many years of communication with different generations of students in the course Scriptwriting Craft at the Faculty of Journalism and Mass Communication, Department of Radio and Television. Its ambition is not merely to provide tools for creating scripts, but to propose a method of critical thinking and awareness: how the media create reality, how that reality draws people in, and how one can remain a free participant rather than a puppet in someone else's media scenario. At the foundation of this book lies the conviction that the most important thing for the journalist, whether in media narrative or media scenario, is not the technique of writing, but the preservation of a moral compass. The greatest danger is that, in striving to become a professional, the journalist may imperceptibly turn into a cynic for whom truth is merely a genre, not a duty.

Introduction: Smirnenski's Ladder

The Ladder That Leads Downwards

'I am a plebeian by birth and all the ragged wretches…
Young man, one more step! Just one more step and you will take revenge! But for that step I always demand double ransom: give me your heart and your memory!
The young man waved his hand:
My heart? No! That is too cruel!
The Devil laughed loudly, authoritatively:
I am not so cruel. In return I will give you a golden heart and a new memory!'
Hristo Smirnenski, 'A Tale of the Ladder', 1923

Hristo Smirnenski (1898–1923) was not only a poet, but also a journalist whose sensitivity to social injustice turned his pen into a moral litmus test for his time. His work for the newspapers Balgaran, Laughter and Tears, and Red Laughter shows that for him the word was not merely a tool, but a moral responsibility. 'A Tale of the Ladder', written shortly before his death, is the most condensed allegory of the temptations of human ascent, particularly relevant to the journalist, for whom every step in a career is simultaneously professional advancement and an ethical trial. The greatest danger for the young reporter is to become a character in someone else's scenario while believing that he is writing his own. At the centre of the parable stands the young man, a 'plebeian by birth', who begins his journey convinced that he will fight for truth and for his brothers. Before him rises a white marble ladder, a symbol of success, power, and recognition. Beside him stands the Devil, not as a monster, but as a gatekeeper to the elite, calm and reasonable, resembling an experienced editor who offers 'terms'. They seem small, almost unnoticeable: 'just one little thing'. Yet the price is always a part of what makes one human: hearing, sight, heart, memory. On the first step the young man loses his hearing, supposedly so as not to be distracted by the noise of the crowd, but in doing so he ceases to hear the pain of others. Then he loses his eyes, supposedly to see 'more clearly', but he can no longer distinguish suffering from a smile. Finally, he gives up his heart and his memory in order to feel 'calmer' and 'more objective'. At that point he becomes a 'prince by birth', content and happy, because he no longer has anything with which to measure pain. In this way Smirnenski shows how social ascent, when followed according to чужди rules, can turn into a process of dehumanisation. The Devil in the parable is a symbol of the system that makes obedience a mandatory condition for success. He does not take bribes, but organs: hearing, sight, conscience, memory. Thus a world is

constructed in which the journalist can advance only by gradually ceasing to respond to injustice, to see reality, and to remember the reasons for having begun in the first place. Success is paid for by the erasure of empathy. This ladder is not only a metaphor for power, but also for the path of the journalist who begins with the ideal of being a voice for the voiceless, but with each new step feels how that voice blends into the chorus of convenience. First, uncomfortable questions are no longer asked. Then one begins to speak 'by script', not because there are direct orders, but because the memory of genuine outrage has already faded. The ascent is secure, but without direction. At the top awaits not freedom, but the silence of self-satisfaction. In this way the young journalist, without noticing, begins to participate in someone else's media scenario. Instead of being a witness to events, he becomes an actor in a production whose logic he does not determine. Gradually his words begin to follow the rhythm of the system he supposedly criticises. The temptation of success, invitations to television studios, prestigious positions, patrons, turns out to be the same white marble ladder with pink veins. It looks beautiful, but it leads downwards. The media in which the young man begins as an idealist turn into a theatre where everything is spectacle and the viewer is part of the scenario. In a world where there is no longer a passive audience, everyone is drawn into a network of narratives, comments, likes, posts, without realising that they are performing a role written by someone else. It is precisely here that the danger reveals itself: the journalist, who was meant to guard the moral compass of society, loses his own. For this reason, young journalists should not strive solely to master the writing of texts, but above all to learn how to protect themselves from them. To recognise when their words, questions, or images become part of someone else's design, when they imperceptibly begin to serve a plot written by others. To recognise when their text, interview, or commentary is part of a larger manipulative construction. To ask not only 'what will be liked', but 'what is true'. To remember that professional ethics is not a formality, but a daily choice between conscience and convenience, between testimony and participation. 'A Tale of the Ladder' remains both a warning and a mirror. In it, everyone can see their own ascent, with small compromises, minor bargains, and unspoken truths. True ascent is not reaching the top, but doing so without losing the hearing for truth, the eyes for injustice, the heart for human pain, and the memory of what made one set out in the first place. Because it is better to climb slowly and with humanity than quickly and without a soul.

The Media Dilemma

'The spectacle is not a collection of images; it is a social relation among people, mediated by images.'
— Guy Debord

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, humanity lives in a paradox: never before has there been so much information, yet never have people been so confused, isolated, and vulnerable to manipulation. The old ideal of a new world information order[1], formulated in the MacBride Report in 1980 as a hope for justice and equal access to communication, today sounds like an echo from another era. The idea of a more humane media world has been absorbed by market logic, while the place of the public interest has been taken by advertising and the algorithm. The new century, however, requires not merely new technologies, but a new type of human being capable of living with them, endowed with moral sensitivity and critical thinking. The

[1] MacBride, S. (ed.) (1980) Many Voices, One World: Towards a New, More Just and More Efficient World Information and Communication Order. Paris: UNESCO.

documentary film The Social Dilemma[2] by Jeff Orlowski makes clear why change cannot come from outside. Former employees of Google, Facebook, and Twitter admit that they have created a system in which 'disinformation sells better than truth'. This is an attention economy in which emotions are commodities and data are weapons. The architects of this new reality, among them Tristan Harris, Tim Kendall, and Chamath Palihapitiya, warn that the machine no longer serves the human being, but reshapes the human according to its own needs. Renée DiResta[3] from the Stanford Internet Observatory adds that social networks undermine the foundations of democracy, because within them every user is simultaneously a voter and an object of marketing. The internet turns into an arena in which facts lose weight and the angriest voice wins attention. Against this background, media theory itself is not without blame. In the second half of the twentieth century, a large part of the academic world ceased to be a critical observer and became a servicing apparatus for industry. Denis McQuail[4] speaks of a 'reverential fear toward the new power of advertisers and propagandists', a submission that turns research into a justification for manipulative practices. Thus the media begin to shape a world in which emotion prevails over reason and outrage sells better than argument. In 2021, the International Association for Media and Communication Research[5] published the Manifesto for Public Media and Public Service Internet, signed by hundreds of scholars, among them Noam Chomsky and Jürgen Habermas. They call for the creation of a public digital sector, spaces free from commercial interests, where information is a common good rather than a means of control. According to them, the online environment is dominated by surveillance, advertising, fake news, and algorithms that rank content according to its emotional intensity rather than its truth. The internet, which was meant to connect, today divides; meant to liberate, it instead encloses people in bubbles of like-mindedness. What was once called the 'information society' has turned into a 'society of distraction'. The manufacture of consent is turned to a manufacture of dissent[6] according to Peter Ayolov. The crisis of trust is not only technological, but moral. Every advance in communication generates a new imbalance, because old ethical systems fail to keep pace with the speed of change. As early as 1969, Kenneth Clark[7] warned of the arrival of 'heroic materialism', a world in which people believe only in what they can produce and sell. Today this diagnosis has become reality: humanity possesses all the knowledge in the world, yet loses the ability to distinguish meaning from noise. The media dilemma is not only a political, but an anthropological problem. Technologies merely expose human weaknesses, narcissism, fear, aggression, the need for belonging. Algorithms do not make people worse; they only amplify what people already are. The solution cannot come from a new law or code, but from a change within the human being. In a world where every message is a potential manipulation, the moral compass is the only protection. The new era does not need a restoration of old media, but their rebirth, a culture in which knowledge is not measured in clicks, but in understanding. The journalist should not be a broker of scandals, but a mediator of meaning. A society that cannot distinguish truth from deception loses its instinct for self-preservation. That is why change must begin with the young, with those who feel the emptiness of the digital environment and refuse to be extras in someone else's scenario. They are the first generation that can turn the internet from a marketplace of

[2] Harris, T. (interviewee), Kendall, T., McNamee, R., Siebert, J., Palihapitiya, C. and Parker, S. (interviewees) (2020) The Social Dilemma [Documentary film]. Directed by Jeff Orlowski. Netflix.
[3] DiResta, R. (2020) Stanford Internet Observatory research cited in The Social Dilemma. Stanford University.
[4] McQuail, D. (2010) McQuail's Mass Communication Theory. 6th edn. London: Sage.
[5] International Association for Media and Communication Research (IAMCR) (2021) Manifesto for Public Media and Public Service Internet. IAMCR.
[6] Ayolov, P. (2023). The Economic Policy of Online Media. Taylor & Francis.
[7] Clark, K. (1969) Civilisation: A Personal View. London: BBC.

emotions into a space of knowledge. Their task is not to destroy, but to create, to build cultural ecosystems in which data serve the human being, not the human being the data. Clark once said that one may look to the future with optimism, but not necessarily with joy. Today this thought sounds prophetic: the old media world is dying, and the new one has not yet been born. Between them stands a generation that must choose whether it will be a spectator or a creator of the new era. True change will come not through an algorithm, but through a new human being, capable of speaking with truth and listening with the heart.

Ethical Narratives

'Responsibility is always personal, even when it is exercised within a system.'
— Hannah Arendt

Ethical narratives in journalism can be truly understood only when placed within the context of the media stage. Throughout the twentieth century this stage was clearly defined: a small number of centres of power broadcast one-directional messages to many spectators. Ethics then appeared as a set of rules for those who held the microphone. In Bulgarian journalism, attempts to introduce ethical codes often turned into a parody of the very principles they were meant to defend. In different periods, two separate codes operated, signed by different unions, each claiming moral legitimacy but exerting no real influence on editorial practice. Newsrooms cited them ritualistically, only to violate them in the first sensational headline. In this way ethics turned into décor, a sign at the entrance to the profession, while the content behind it increasingly replaced morality with effect. In this context, the ethical narrative becomes a personal task. New journalists do not need to 'observe' someone else's code; they must create it themselves, not as a document, but as an inner story that helps them remain whole in an environment where facts disintegrate into fragments. The ethical narrative is the story one tells oneself when facing a human boundary: what can be shown without humiliating; what must be withheld without concealing; when a fact ceases to be knowledge and turns into a weapon. Ethics is not a regulation, but a habit of stopping before another person's pain and refusing to turn suffering into a resource for clicking. Every journalistic choice carries a moral cost. The source, the tone, the headline, the selected image, all are forms of interpretation, and every interpretation has consequences. The ethical journalist does not hide behind 'objectivity', but reveals the process: shows how facts are checked, how context is arranged, why it is worth risking the utterance of a particular truth. In a world where trust is a scarce currency, transparency is the only real backing it has. This makes the ethical narrative not merely part of the craft, but the foundation of public trust. Ethics is also a story about the relationship between the journalist and the institution. Many newsrooms still understand the 'ethical code' as an internal PR document, a text that justifies already established practices. But ethics is not applied administratively; it happens at the moment of choice. Does the journalist look at the person opposite as a subject or as a dramatic resource? Are facts used to explain the world, or to deform it? The real code is not framed on a wall, but stored in the reporter's memory. There it is decided whether words will become weapons or testimony. In the new media world, horizontal, fragmented, accelerated, journalistic ethics is no longer a professional monopoly. Anyone who publishes can cause harm with a single click. This turns the ethical narrative into a public necessity. It is the frame through which society evaluates itself: whether information is treated as a commodity or as a common good. Ethics is the boundary between testimony and manipulation, between participation and exploitation. That is why every text must contain an invisible moral

question: what does this narrative do to the reality it enters? Does it help understanding, or does it produce new distrust? Does it show what needs to be seen, or does it conceal something with convenient words? In the age of algorithms, speed, and anonymity, morality becomes a condition for the survival of the profession. Algorithms do not know conscience, the market does not reward the ability to stop in time. Precisely for this reason the journalist must possess an inner compass that cannot be delegated to an automatic system. The ethical narrative is an antidote to mechanical objectivity, because only a person who knows where the boundary of pain lies can tell the truth without distorting it. True journalism does not say everything it knows, but what society can bear without losing its humanity. Here the theme of ethics naturally connects with the idea of the media as a stage. In the digital world journalism is no longer the sole actor; everyone is on stage at once. The audience has turned into a participant, the witness into a narrator, the user into a co-author. This makes the public articulation of moral positions itself part of the stage performance: every ethical dilemma unfolds live, before an audience that reacts instantly. The ethical narrative, which in the past lived within the reporter's inner struggle, today becomes a public performance, visible, shared, commented on, judged. Professional integrity is no longer only an internal choice, but a social act. This is precisely what a number of contemporary researchers emphasise. Closest to this idea is the article[8] 'The Playful Media Society: From Participation to Performance' from 2019 by Nick Couldry and Andreas Hepp, which shows how digital media turn communication into a constant act of performance. The volume The Rise of Networked Publics from 2010, edited by Danah Boyd[9], describes how the traditional vertical structure is replaced by networks in which the roles of sender and receiver constantly shift. In Spreadable Media from 2013, Henry Jenkins[10], Sam Ford, and Joshua Green analyse how active audiences rewrite and perform content. The Participatory Condition in the Digital Age[11] from 2016 shows how media open stages for action, while Mark Deuze[12] in Media Life from 2011 describes media as an environment in which life itself is performed. Michael Warner[13] in Publics and Counterpublics from 2005 reveals how publics are formed through participation, and Taina Bucher[14] in The Performative Turn in Digital Communication from 2020 emphasises that identity is performed rather than observed. This broad body of research shows one thing: the ethical narrative is no longer a closed personal story, but a public role played on the media stage. And only the one who plays honestly can remain human in a world that tempts everyone to become a character.

The Media Stage

'In the network society, audiences are no longer passive recipients of messages; they become active participants in communication.'
— Manuel Castells

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[8] Couldry, N. & Hepp, A. (2019) 'The Playful Media Society: From Participation to Performance', Journal of Communication, 69(2), pp. 199–221.
[9] Boyd, D. (ed.) (2010) The Rise of Networked Publics. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
[10] Jenkins, H., Ford, S. & Green, J. (2013) Spreadable Media: Creating Value and Meaning in a Networked Culture. New York: New York University Press.
[11] Barney, D. et al. (2016) The Participatory Condition in the Digital Age. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
[12] Deuze, M. (2011) Media Life. Cambridge: Polity Press.
[13] Warner, M. (2005) Publics and Counterpublics. New York: Zone Books.
[14] Bucher, T. (2020) 'The Performative Turn in Digital Communication', New Media & Society, 22(4), pp. 688–706.

Throughout the twentieth century, mass communication resembled a theatre with a single stage and countless seats. A small number of centres of power and influence—states, editorial offices, studios—wrote the plot, distributed the roles, and projected the finished performance toward a passive audience. Image, sound, and print moved vertically, from top to bottom. The role of the spectator was to listen, to empathise with the heroes, and to repeat their lines at home. The internet changed this fundamentally. In the new era, mass communication no longer seeks spectators but actors. The transition is from ‘a story that happens to us’ to ‘a scenario in which we play’—each of us, at any moment. The old system rested on centralised content production and control by a limited number of gatekeepers. The audience was conceived as a homogeneous mass, and success was measured by reach and frequency—how many people saw, heard, or read. The logic was simple: sender–channel–receiver. Topic, frame, and timing were strictly defined, and the spectator was the terminal point of the process. The digital environment inverted this hierarchy: channels multiplied, thresholds fell, roles became interchangeable. Everyone carries a camera, a microphone, and an editorial desk in their pocket. The audience dissolved into networks of communities, and communication acquired a horizontal dynamic—friend to friend, follower to creator and back again. The message is no longer merely information but a social action, a ritual of belonging, and a stage for participation.

The difference is not only technological but dramaturgical. The twentieth century thought in plots—heroes, conflicts, resolutions that ‘happened’ to the spectator. The twenty-first century thinks in scenographies—spaces and interfaces that invite the spectator to enter, to improvise, and to rewrite. Where once it was said, ‘Here is the story’, today the question is, ‘Here is the stage—what will you do?’ Influence is no longer measured solely by changes in attitudes but by visible consequences—likes, comments, shares, signatures, donations, protest actions. The effect is behavioural and networked: the message does not end with the recipient but continues as a chain of reactions. On this new stage, everyone is a potential protagonist. Hashtags convene protests, phone videos become evidence in court, maps and applications direct humanitarian efforts. Streams of personal broadcasts reshape the agenda. The journalist no longer ‘owns’ the story, nor does the politician own the stage. The audience is co-screenwriter, co-director, and often the principal performer of the action. Yet here too there is a dark side: manipulative scenarios spread instantly, roles are assumed by bots, trolls, and fake profiles, and factories of outrage dictate improvisations without rehearsal. Even this confirms the new rule—we are no longer spectators but acting subjects, sometimes inspired, sometimes deceived.

If communication is a stage, society needs a new scenography—one that encourages participation and responsibility. Open entrances are required: easy access to publishing, to data, and to verification tools. Transparent rules are needed—clear moderation norms and visible algorithms. Roles must exist for everyone: systems that reward not only the loudest voice but also the fact-checker, the facilitator, the translator, the archivist. Formats of togetherness are necessary—spaces where discussion and decision-making take place jointly, rather than applause by habit. Most essential is the pathway from fact to action: from ‘I learned’ to ‘I verified’, ‘I shared’, ‘I participated’. In this context, the journalist is no longer merely a storyteller but a director of participation. Every text must answer the question: ‘What can the reader do with this knowledge?’—verify it, supplement it, submit a signal, offer help. Data and context must be open, and methods explained, so that verification can be reproduced. A need emerges for network ethics: respect for communities, avoidance of exploiting personal tragedies, and care for the consequences of publication. The most valuable skill of the journalist is the ability to transform passive outrage into meaningful action.

Political communication also changes its verb—from ‘I explain’ to ‘I participate’. Old forms of one-way petitions and consultations without outcomes no longer work. New forms require the joint writing of rules, visible processes of accountability, civic budgets, and open dashboards of promises and their fulfilment. This is not utopia but an engineering task—the design of stages on which people can genuinely change something. The same transition is experienced by science and education—from lecture to laboratory for all, from textbook to simulator, from closed article to open experiment. The goal is no longer simply to watch knowledge but to practise it. And yet, when everyone is an actor, stages of deception also multiply. Immune systems are needed—collective verification, algorithmic slowing, limits on automated accounts, ethics by default. The solution is not a return to the one-way spotlight but the construction of a better stage for participation. In the old model, success was measured by ratings. In the new, it is measured by consequences: how many people changed something after encountering the content. Success is now an act, not an act of watching. The new media epoch will be created not by hierarchies but by communities of engineers of participation—journalists, researchers, designers, teachers, activists. Their mission is to design stages where access is equal, rules are fair, and results are visible. The transition in media is a transition within ourselves: from spectators who consume a plot to acting subjects who write a scenario with consequences. The new century will not tell itself—it will be performed. The question is not what we will watch tomorrow, but which stage we step onto today, and with whom.

The Old Media Order

‘Information is power, and when power is concentrated, access to information becomes a privilege.’
— Seán MacBride

The idea[15] of a ‘New World Information and Communication Order’ (NWICO, UNESCO) was one of the great promises of the twentieth century—a promise that was never fulfilled. The reason was not a lack of clear diagnosis or workable solutions, but the fact that those expected to cure the system were feeding on the very disease from which it suffered. Political and economic elites, institutions, and generations that had built the old media regime had no interest in changing it: their power, influence, and profits flowed precisely from it. Reform therefore remained a ritual—words about change spoken with the intention that everything should remain the same. Today, digital technologies mercilessly expose the scale of this inequality. A small number of centres control the production, distribution, and legitimation of knowledge, while the peripheries most often remain silent or speak only within echo chambers. Thus emerges an informational totalitarianism without slogans, sustained by algorithms, filters, and one-way traffic of truths. When communication is understood as the transmission of messages from source to receiver, it inevitably turns into a channel of commands. A new conception of communication as reciprocity and co-presence erodes hierarchies, and for that very reason old hierarchies block it by every possible means.

As early as 1980, the UNESCO International Commission for the Study of Communication Problems, chaired by Sean MacBride, formulated a precise diagnosis: concentration of

[15] MacBride, S. (ed.) (1980) Many Voices, One World: Towards a New, More Just and More Efficient World Information and Communication Order. Paris: UNESCO.

informational power, monopolies, asymmetrical exchange, and lack of access to content production. The solution appeared straightforward—more sources and channels, equality between regions, an ethics of technology, freedom and responsibility for journalists, training in developing countries. Even the proposal for a ‘global information bank’—an early vision of the internet—was accompanied by a warning: machines can democratise society, but they can also centralise it tyrannically. The reaction was predictable. When the project threatened the hegemony of the wealthy media world, accusations of ‘collectivism’ followed and key states withdrew from UNESCO. Not because the idea was wrong, but because it endangered established privileges. After this failure came not democratisation but commercialisation. Control simply changed its form. Instead of uniform state channels, private platforms appeared with invisible proprietary rules; instead of a few speakers, millions of ‘users’, ordered by algorithms. This was the ‘Murdochisation’ of global communication—an era in which attention became a commodity and truth a unit of exchange. So-called net neutrality remained the last defence of the public interest. Once it was breached, the operator of the pipe also became the editor of the content, and the ‘open internet’ proved open only to those who could afford to pay.

The older generations are not villains, but rational actors within a system of incentives. They speak of change, yet do not relinquish the access, tax privileges, and metrics that sustain their power. Reform turns into spectacle: platforms ‘fight disinformation’ without touching the advertising mechanism that feeds it; media defend ‘truth’ while placing sponsored sensation on the front page; states preach ‘pluralism’ while distributing resources according to political loyalty. No one cuts the branch on which they sit. The ‘new order’ was declared a utopia not because it is impossible, but because it requires moral change—sharing power, abandoning monopolies, and recognising the peripheries as co-authors rather than as an audience. Such an ethic does not deliver quick profit. The market perfects its control not through a single ideology of consensus, but through an industry of dissent—segmented groups, tribal hostilities, and algorithms that reward emotional polarisation. Here a generational rift opens. Old elites want ‘change without change’: modern studios, the same one-way flow; social media profiles, but a monological tone. The young, however, live by the logic of participation: they do not watch content, they create it; they do not wait for a plot, they enter the stage; they do not trust sources, they verify networks. For them, ‘the audience’ is an anachronism, and ‘objectivity’ is not a slogan but a procedure grounded in open data and traceable decisions. Hence hope lies not in repairing the old, but in building the new.

The new information order of the twenty-first century will not emerge through declarations, but through new institutions and practices: public platforms for knowledge, open algorithms, cooperative newsrooms, and civic laboratories. Media funding must be aligned with truth—models that reward verification and useful action rather than scandal. Clear protocols of transparency are required—traceable origins of information, public editorial decisions, and shared standards. Platform governance must include the communities that use them; ombudspersons and civic juries should exercise real oversight. Media literacy education must shift from theoretical coursework to practicum—learning through the replication of journalistic investigations, collaborative editing of databases, and the production of verifiable information. Only in this way are competent participants formed, not spectators. In parallel, a dual strategy is needed: work within the system for minimal ethics and transparency, while also building external community structures that do not depend on corporate interests. UNESCO’s initiative failed because it required dismantling the very source of power of the old elites. But this does not invalidate its vision—on the contrary, it makes it more relevant than ever. The new world information order will not be signed by diplomats, but built by networks of young people, citizens, and researchers who have nothing to lose from change. The old order can articulate the

idea of renewal, but it cannot realise it—it was designed to reproduce itself. If communication based on reciprocity rather than command is desired, permission should not be awaited from the unchangeable. The new order will be born not in halls of power, but in communities that build their own stages and invite the world to participate not as an audience, but as a co-author.

The Generational Rift

'A society that has become rigid develops elaborate defenses against change.'
— John W. Gardner

John Gardner's 'ageing society' warning captures the tension described in detail by Erik Barnouw's book[16] The Sponsor (1978). It is a tension born of the interweaving of culture, commerce, and control, through which the media institutions of the twentieth century turned the new into the safe and the unpredictable into the manageable. In Barnouw's account, the word 'culture' becomes a label for a form of programming that is distant, complete, and without risk. Thus emerges a model of ageing: preservation is confused with progress, refinement with renewal, memory with imagination. In the media, this rift appears as a transition from television hierarchies to a culture of participation in the online environment, where the viewer becomes a co-author of the stage. Public television, as observed by Barnouw, functions as a cautious museum. Adaptations of classic novels and historical dramas offer comfort through distance—other times, other places, other struggles. Corporate sponsorship makes elegance possible, but also draws boundaries: 'culture' is that which does not threaten the present. Commercial channels, by contrast, colonise the present according to advertising budgets, selling not only products but ways of life, views of the human being, and visions of the future. The 'window on the world' is measured by whoever pays for the glass. This process is both economic and generational. The old media elite seeks to neutralise the energy of the young—their inclination toward experiment, dissent, and political awareness—through policies, funding hierarchies, and a domesticated language of the 'educational'. Culture becomes equated with control. Many young creators remain outside the narrative of their own time, admitted only as performers of roles written by previous generations. As Gardner emphasises, institutions protect themselves not through learning, but through resistance.

Barnouw's metaphor of the screen as a 'window' remains valid in the twenty-first century, but the windows are now counted in billions. Platforms decentralise production while centrally 'curating' visibility. The algorithmic 'sponsor' inherits the role of the corporate one: it rewards predictable emotions—desire, outrage, distraction—and punishes complexity. The technology appears new, but the psychology is old. The generational dynamic repeats itself: a new tool emerges; youth culture reimagines it; the ageing elite seeks to regulate, monetise, and disarm it. Today's conflict is a clash between a culture of broadcasting and a culture of participation. Traditional media measure success through reach, ratings, and control of the frame; digital communities measure it through co-authorship, collaboration, and evolving context in real time. If the public culture of the twentieth century sought security in retrospection, the new one seeks meaning in shared experience: first-person streams, crowdsourced investigations, citizen science, co-created narratives. And yet the 'sponsor' is still here—in the arranging systems that structure the stage to sell attention most efficiently. The rift, therefore, is not merely a matter of age, but of

[16] Barnouw, E. (1978). The Sponsor. Transaction Publishers.

tempo and geometry. The twentieth century was linear: from studio to living room, from creator to consumer. The twenty-first century is circular and reticular: every user is a potential creator, every narrative a potential remix. The older the order, the more eagerly it speaks the language of innovation in order to conceal its immutability. 'Digital transformation' and 'creative economy' often replace the older word 'culture' as a diplomatic code for predictability. Gardner is right: the ageing mind invents defences against the very tools that might rejuvenate it.

What future is being sold to us? Barnouw insists that this is the question that must be asked. The answer depends on whether media systems can overcome their reflex of self-preservation. The next media culture implies a transition from sponsorship to shared stewardship: not the financing of content by those who wish to sell, but the creation of spaces by communities that wish to share. This means models that reward contribution, transparency, and trust; open data, methods, and editorial logs; feedback mechanisms with real consequences. The new 'window' must also be a mirror—showing not only what we watch, but how we change when we watch and act together. The generational task is double. The old must accept that experience without adaptability becomes an obstacle; the young must recognise that destruction without memory risks repeating the same cycle in accelerated form. The meeting point of memory and invention is where the next narrative emerges: when history ceases to be a refuge and becomes a resource; when technology recovers its moral meaning—not as spectacle, but as conversation. Then 'culture' once again signifies the co-emergence of living practices transmitted between generations—now in both directions. And if an ageing society habitually builds fortresses, the young must construct bridges: stages on which participation does not wait for permission, but assumes responsibility for the shared plot.

The Enchanted Circle Online

'Story is a circle. A circle is a closed loop, and it represents a problem that must be solved again and again.'
— Dan Harmon

In the article[17] 'How Dan Harmon Drives Himself Crazy Making Community' (2011), the basic principle of the Story Circle is described—Dan Harmon's model of screenwriting in which the protagonist moves through an eight-stage cycle from comfort to change and back again. This endless rotation—like a hamster wheel—maintains the inertia of the series: the hero leaves the familiar, passes through chaos, learns a lesson, returns 'changed', and yet the next episode returns him once more to the beginning. In this way, television and online series preserve a perpetual dynamic of motion without final growth or closure, transforming repetition into the dramatic engine of the narrative.

Today, however, this circle no longer belongs only to the screen. It has migrated from the script into the everyday life of the digital subject, who has turned life itself into an endless series whose episodes unfold in real time—within feeds, stories, and streams. With the shift from television plots to short online formats, the boundary between documentary and fiction dissolves. TikTok videos, reels, vlogs, and live streams combine real events with staged spontaneity—something between documentary narration and improvised drama, where the script is no longer written in advance but emerges in the act of scrolling itself. The media narrative becomes a scenario of

[17] Raftery, B. (n.d.). How Dan Harmon Drives Himself Crazy Making Community. [online] Wired. Available at: https://www.wired.com/2011/09/mf-harmon/.

endless scrolling, or ‘doomscrolling’: a mechanical turning over of the same banal content in search of some shocking, apocalyptic piece of news. The media scenario ceases to be a text authored by someone and becomes a continuous flow of actions, reactions, and edits in which the viewer is an accomplice. Every click, comment, like, or share becomes a montage gesture—an act of editing someone else’s content and producing new content. Thus, everyone becomes not only a viewer, but also a screenwriter, commentator, critic, and editor of their own media experience. The structure of the classical story is replaced by a non-linear scenario constructed from countless micro-gestures—scrolls, link openings, redirects, reactions.

Within this enchanted circle, the narrative no longer has direction—only movement. The aim is not to reach an end or a conclusion, but to remain inside the process of participation itself. Instead of Smirnenski’s ladder, where the hero loses his senses as he ascends toward the ‘princes’ at the top, today’s digital hero loses sensitivity on the way down—not toward the elite, but toward the mass. Rather than striving for individual insight, he seeks collective visibility: to be part of the multitude that shares, comments, and demonstrates moral solidarity with the ‘ethical’ causes of the day. Thus, the moral becomes visual, and the ethical gesture becomes a public sign of belonging. The empty placard, shared thousands of times, replaces inner conviction. The mass cause lives briefly but intensely: outrage, mobilisation, dissipation, and the next trend. Each wave promises moral clarity, yet leads to a deeper blurring of the boundary between conviction and display. The hashtag replaces the argument, the story replaces conscience, and participation replaces critical distance.

Instead of a classical drama with beginning, conflict, and resolution, online life turns into an ethical looping—an endless montage of reactions in which every attempt at authenticity is quickly absorbed by the flow. In the digital version of the circle, the hero passes through reversal and recognition within seconds, only for the cycle to repeat in the next frame. There is no catharsis, only continuous reflex. The ‘fairy tale of the enchanted circle’ replaces the ladder of ascent with a spiral of belonging. Here the hero does not seek to reach the top, but to merge with the mass, to be ‘with one’s own’, to prove loyalty to the dominant moral system of the day. Mass participation itself becomes a value—a proof of correctness and virtue. In this world, where everyone is a co-author and all together form the audience, the scenario never ends: it simply reloads—with the next scroll, the next share, the next wave of collective emotion.

In the age of endless scrolling, the circle of the story becomes a circle of repetition, with algorithms alone sustaining the illusion of movement. The on-screen hero and the viewer merge into a single digital character who simultaneously creates and consumes content without changing. The true challenge is no longer to become visible, but to remain alive—to transform the chaos of constant updating into a narrative that has meaning, even when it has no end. Instead, the contemporary media subject increasingly seeks not meaning but mechanical motion—the constant confirmation of being part of the flow. Thus, endless scrolling becomes the new myth of participation—a myth in which the story is not told, but spun.

"Stay Mad"

‘Freedom of speech here often means only the freedom to shout whatever you like—inside your own home.’

— Georgi Markov (London, 1977)

In his 1977 letter to Dimitar Bochev, Georgi Markov—already in exile and working at the BBC—confesses the moral position of a person who refuses to serve any power, eastern or western. Having fled communist Bulgaria, he discovers in London a new form of dependence: more refined, clothed in the language of freedom, yet no less restrictive. 'Freedom of speech', he writes, is reduced to the right to shout in one's own home; the moment one attempts to speak publicly, one encounters 'the line'. In the East it descends from the party; in the West, from the editorial office. The difference is only stylistic: crude there, smoothly polished here. On both sides, the journalist lives under the same condition—to avoid causing trouble. For Markov, true censorship is not ideological but moral. It comes not from an order, but from the fear of losing one's livelihood. In the letter, he diagnoses the illness of the age as a 'slightly filthy, petty, selfish scraping-by'—a semblance of normality in which people exchange conscience for security. His satirical gaze pierces both socialism and capitalism: in both worlds, institutions exist to reproduce mediocrity. Talent is suspect, the independent mind inconvenient. His work at the BBC brings him no illusions. Markov sees the western media machine as a mirror twin of communist propaganda: the same fear of disturbing 'order', the same deference to invisible interests, the same faceless administration. The profession of journalism appears threatened not by external dictatorship, but by internal domestication. 'Truth, justice, love, beauty'—these words, he says, do not drive the news; what drives it is the convenience of surviving without scandal. In such an environment, every news worker becomes a small part of the 'octopus' that holds you not through violence, but through habit. From this perspective, Markov formulates a moral boundary that remains valid today: the divide in the world is not between 'left' and 'right', but between those who 'can' and those who 'cannot'—between people capable of creating and people who merely administer. The creator, by nature, does not submit to the collective. The first sign of talent is disagreement. That is precisely why power—under whatever name it hides—hates creators: every act of creation reminds administrators that they themselves cannot create. At the BBC, Markov encounters the same 'editorial monkeys' he knew in Sofia—people who do not think, but 'tick-tock their way to retirement', saying 'yes, sir' to every mediocre dogma.

The letter to Bochev is more than a personal confession; it is an ethical document about journalism as a form of conscience. 'Stay mad', Markov writes, because madness is the last refuge of the free person. It is a refusal to fit in, to agree, to become a 'reasonable' parasite. True madness is the essence of creativity—the ability to believe in truth when everyone else has made peace with lies. His 'madness' is not a romantic pose, but a professional ethic: to speak even when you know you will not be broadcast. 'Write, if you can write; paint, if you can paint; forge, plough, sing'—this is his manifesto of personal action. Freedom of speech is not an institutional favour, but a personal practice—the stubbornness to turn truth into work while the world pretends not to hear you. When works become undeniable, Markov says, the same conformists who ignored you will applaud you in order to appropriate what you have done. It has always been so—'the musically deaf sigh over Beethoven'. His position is moral not because it preaches, but because it demands personal responsibility. To accept the compromise that gives you bread, but to refuse the one that takes away your voice. To know that you can remain alone and still speak. To believe that journalism is not a service, but a testimony—a form of truth that does not require permission.

In an age of censorship and propaganda, Markov sees salvation not in a new ideology, but in stubborn human dissent. His example reminds us that true freedom is not measured by how many microphones you have, but by whether you can say 'no' to everyone. And when he writes 'stay mad', he is in fact saying: remain faithful to your own measure of truth, even when the world calls it madness. Thus, the letter from London sounds like a manifesto for the moral courage of the journalist. It warns that even the most respectable democracy can turn into a

theatre of consent if it lacks voices willing to take risks. Georgi Markov leaves Bulgaria, but he does not abandon the responsibility to speak the truth. And his 'stay mad' remains a testament to all who speak publicly: do not be convenient, do not be safe, do not stand in line—be free, because only free people can safeguard humanity. To remain 'mad' means to preserve that inner madness which compels us to speak the truth even when everyone else is silent. In the future of journalism, this madness will be the only form of sanity—the moral impulse to climb Smirnenski's ladder without selling one's hearing, eyes, and heart.

1. The Media Narrative

1.1. Interactive Narratives

Narrative in the Media Age: From Communication to Interpretation

'More information does not mean more communication.'
— Dominique Wolton

In the book [18] Media Narrative (2017), Snezhana Popova examines the ways in which communication and storytelling are transformed within the digital and interactive environment. She raises the question of whether an abundance of information actually produces more communication and arrives at the conclusion that the quantity of data does not necessarily generate understanding or connectedness. The accumulation of content often leads to 'interactive loneliness'—an illusion of communication in which human connection is replaced by a continuous exchange of signs devoid of meaning. Popova builds on the ideas of Dominique Wolton, who understands communication not as a mechanical process but as a cultural activity that presupposes a vision of the human being and society. In the age of networked connectivity, communication becomes a field of social conflict and value confrontation rather than a purely technical exchange. The internet creates new possibilities for expression and sharing, yet simultaneously generates a sense of fragmentation and superficiality. The digital environment gathers millions of voices but deprives communication of depth.

In the media age, communication gradually retreats from its primary form of reciprocity and turns into a process of interpretation. Streams of information, images, and messages create the illusion of constant connection, but in reality often lead to isolation and the erosion of meaning. Communication, once grounded in shared experience and trust, is today replaced by a self-sustaining exchange of signs that rarely produces understanding. In the digital environment, speech is replaced by clicks, reactions by emojis, and understanding by algorithmic assumptions about human attention. This transition marks a shift from communication as a shared experience to interpretation as an individual act. Genuine communication has always been a two-sided process that reinforces a sense of community and mutuality. In the technological age, however, interaction becomes fragmented: everyone speaks within their own environment, to their own screen, often without an addressee. Platforms turn into intermediaries that dictate not only what

[18] Popova, S. (2017) Media Narrative (Medijnijat Razkaz). Sofia: St. Kliment Ohridski University Press.

is said but how it is thought. The result is a society in which messages are abundant, yet the semantic links between them disintegrate. Communication stripped of context and feedback becomes a flow of interpretations in which every word is rewritten according to the desires and interests of the recipient.

Narrative, which has always been a form of human understanding, now serves as a mechanism of orientation within this oversaturated world. People do not merely exchange information; they arrange their experiences into stories that impose coherence on chaos. In media culture, this capacity is put to the test—narratives turn into products, severed from the experience that generated them. They circulate across screens and profiles, endlessly rewritten and adapted according to market logic. Thus emerge the new myths of the digital age—stories without authorship, in which truth has no stable place and meaning depends on the number of views. The transition from communication to interpretation is not only technological but cultural and cognitive. It reflects a change in the way human beings think and perceive reality. Communication presupposes participation and sharing, whereas interpretation requires distance and observation. Today's media subject often becomes not a participant but an interpreter of their own life—a commentator on content that they simultaneously produce and consume. When every narrative turns into an object of interpretation, a peculiar 'informational loneliness' arises: knowledge grows, but reciprocity diminishes.

Yet narrative retains its role as a mediator between knowledge and experience. It remains the only way chaotic information can acquire form and meaning. Every story—whether a journalistic text, an online post, or a visual montage—is an attempt to restore the connection between words and reality. In this sense, interpretation is not merely a consequence of informational excess but a necessary mechanism for survival within it. Through interpretation, human beings seek to overcome fragmentation and restore the meaningful coherence of the world. Media transform the forms of storytelling, but not the need for it. They rearrange time and space, mix facts and fictions, and accelerate the process of forgetting. Nevertheless, the act of storytelling itself preserves the human dimension of communication—every event becomes real only when it is articulated and heard. Interpretation, however fragmented, is an attempt to sustain this dialogue, to restore the human capacity for understanding. Ultimately, the digital age does not destroy communication but transforms it, turning it into a field of constant rewriting. Narrative proves to be the only form through which meaning can be sustained amid informational noise. It is not merely a means of transmitting experience but a way of preserving the human within a world of technological mediation. Complete understanding may be impossible, but the very effort of interpretation maintains the bond between people and preserves the idea of community.

Narrative Identity: Between History and Society

'Personal identity is constituted through the narrative we tell about ourselves.'
— Paul Ricœur

In the digital age, the human being is no longer merely an observer of the stories surrounding them, but a participant in their constant rewriting. Narrative ceases to be a fixed form and becomes a dynamic environment in which society recognises and constructs its own existence. In Media Narrative, Snezhana Popova examines how contemporary media transform narrative into a central instrument for building both social and personal identity. Media culture shifts the focus from the traditional understanding of narrative as a literary genre to its understanding as a mechanism of social meaning-making. Every publication, news item, or social media post represents an attempt to structure lived experience, to situate an isolated event within a broader narrative context. Through this process, contemporary 'narrative identity' takes shape—a sense of belonging that emerges not from stable traditions but from shared stories. The individual no longer carries a ready-made, fixed identity, but creates it again and again through the narratives in which they participate—as author, listener, viewer, or sharer. Media play a decisive role in this process. They do not merely reflect reality but translate it into the language of narrative. Each event is arranged into a plot with a beginning, a climax, and a resolution; facts are subordinated to the dramaturgy of interest. This structuring transforms information into meaning, and the individual into a protagonist or witness within a larger story. In this way, media create shared coordinates for understanding the world, while simultaneously shaping how society thinks about itself.

In the digital environment, this process becomes even more complex. Narratives now circulate freely across platforms—television, the internet, podcasts, social media. They change depending on context, format, and the audience that interprets them. The same story can acquire different meanings depending on where and how it is told. This also alters the very notion of authorship—the boundaries between creator and user blur, and anyone can become a narrator of social meanings. As a result, collective memory is no longer fixed in books or archives, but is constantly updated in real time through the perpetual retelling of events. Media narrative thus becomes a form of social self-interpretation. It creates symbolic frameworks in which the community sees its own reflection. At the same time, however, this capacity to build identities through stories carries risks. Narrative can be used as a tool of manipulation—to steer emotions, to sustain myths, to construct convenient truths. When information submits to the logic of drama rather than facts, society begins to perceive reality through the aesthetics of the script. Truth is displaced by the narrative that presents it. And yet, it is precisely through narrative that human beings find a way to orient themselves within informational chaos. Even in the most commercial or ideologically saturated media forms, the need for meaningful coherence remains irreducible. Storytelling imposes order on experience and situates it within a broader context, allowing individuals to recognise their own position within society. Narrative identity emerges from this constant movement between personal history and public narratives—it is not a given, but a process of continual reconfiguration.

Today's media subject lives in a state of constant interactivity, where every publication is simultaneously a private testimony and a public act. Technologies do not merely accelerate communication; they create new forms of social memory. Every photograph, status update, or comment adds a new layer to the collective narrative through which society describes itself. This ongoing process of storytelling produces a sense of belonging, but also of vulnerability—because identity now depends on how, and by whom, it is narrated. Ultimately, media narrative is both a means of understanding and a means of constructing reality. It shapes how society sees the world and its own place within it. Through narrative, facts become meanings, and community becomes a network of shared stories. Narrative creates identity, but also tests it when the boundary between truth and fiction dissolves. Yet it is precisely in the capacity to narrate and interpret that

the human effort resides—to resist the impersonality of the informational age and to preserve the meaning of shared life.

Interactivity and Network Culture

'If old media consumers were predictable and stayed where they were told, new media consumers are migratory, showing a declining loyalty to any single media outlet or platform.'
— Henry Jenkins

The book Media Narrative examines interactivity and network culture as key forces transforming the very nature of storytelling. In the age of digital communication, narrative is no longer a finished text but a continuous process of creation, rearrangement, and sharing. Within the networked environment it moves across platforms, forms, and communities, changing according to context and participants. This new condition of narrative dissolves the boundary between author and audience and turns every interaction into an act of collective storytelling. Interactivity is not merely a technical possibility but a cultural principle. It reflects the way people make sense of reality—not through passive reception, but through participation. Narrative in the digital age emerges from dialogue, reaction, and play. Every comment, share, or 'like' becomes a miniature fragment of a larger story. The micro-narratives of social networks and blogs form networked structures that self-organise around themes, images, and events. Individual voices intertwine and generate collective narratives—stories without a single centre, in which meaning arises from interaction. Network culture also transforms the logic of time within narrative. Whereas classical storytelling unfolds linearly—with beginning, climax, and end—digital narrative moves in multiple directions simultaneously. Any event can function as a beginning, a continuation, or a deviation. This produces a sense of an endless process in which narratives do not conclude but are interrupted and resumed in new forms. Dialogue is never final: every statement provokes another response, every publication invites a new reading. As a result, narrative becomes a living organism that develops according to the rhythm of networked communication.

Interactivity also creates a new type of relationship between people and media. Users are no longer merely an audience but participants in the production of content. Authorship is distributed among countless voices that supplement, comment on, and rewrite existing stories. This multiplicity generates a unique social dynamic: every act of communication becomes part of a larger narrative unfolding against a background of constant mutual citation and reflection. The network functions as a collective narrator in which participants are simultaneously protagonists and witnesses. Digital technologies also reshape the structure of attention. In the online environment, information is perceived in fragments, and each fragment must carry sufficient emotional charge to be shared. Thus a new media aesthetic emerges—short, striking narratives that replace prolonged reflection with immediate experience. Yet within this fragmentation lies a new form of wholeness: individual micro-narratives cluster into larger symbolic structures that shape collective representations of the world. In this sense, network culture does not negate traditional narrative but rewrites it according to the rhythm of digital time. Interactive forms—video games, web documentaries, virtual worlds—turn storytelling into experience. The audience does not merely follow a plot but acts within it. Every choice leads to a different development of the story, and narrative takes shape through the decisions of participants. This fusion of perception and action transforms storytelling into a collective practice in which knowledge and emotion are produced simultaneously. Narrative becomes a laboratory of communication—a space where people test roles, scenarios, and meanings.

Within network culture, the notion of originality shifts toward the idea of participation. New narratives are born from combinations, remixes, and quotations. Texts and images circulate across platforms, each user modifying them and embedding them within a personal context. This combinatorial thinking becomes a core principle of digital creativity—a structure that values not individual exceptionality but the capacity to connect. In this way, interactivity acquires an ethical dimension: it encourages cooperation and the mutual completion of meaning. In this new environment, the individual does not simply consume stories but lives through them. Each day produces micro-narratives about the self—statuses, photographs, videos—and inserts them into the shared flow of public narrative. The internet turns reality into a network of stories in which individual experience is shared and reinterpreted by many. Narrative no longer belongs to the media but to the participants themselves, who construct it through continuous interaction. Interactivity transforms media culture into a territory of shared storytelling, where meaning arises from the connections between people. In this world there are no fixed boundaries between author and reader, between private and public. Narrative is open, mobile, and collective—a living process through which society constructs its own memory and identity. In the age of networks, to participate is to narrate, and to narrate is to exist.

Formation and Levels of Narrative

'Narrative is not a matter of representing or imitating reality; it is a system of signs.'
— Roland Barthes

The media age rearranges the way narrative is formed by introducing multiple levels through which stories constantly circulate and are transformed. At the base lie micro-narratives—short, self-contained fragments such as a report, post, photograph, or clip that condense an event, emotion, or fact. They spread rapidly, often beyond their original context, and function as 'units of attention' capable of triggering reaction, sharing, or dispute. Above them stands the meso level—an intermediate organisational zone in which multiple fragments are grouped into thematic packages: sections, series, daily cycles, thematic 'files'. It is here that the transition from random flow to recognisable patterns is secured. At the top lies the macro-narrative—a broad symbolic configuration that 'stitches' individual series and episodes into a shared horizon: cultural myths, dominant plots, long-term social images. The three levels thus operate together: the micro-narrative provides impulse, the meso level shapes context, and the macro level stabilises meaning. Narrative formation in this regime depends on three key mechanisms. First, selection: elements with potential for visibility and repetition are chosen from an endless flow. Second, categorisation: selected fragments are named, classified, and arranged within stable sections and generic matrices. Third, serialisation: stories unfold over time in sequences that generate rhythm, expectation, and cumulative effect. The combination of these mechanisms turns fragmented data into socially significant stories and allows audiences to follow extended plotlines even when they are composed of brief and heterogeneous 'episodes'. Audience participation plays a decisive role. The boundary between author and 'receiver' weakens: publics share, comment, remix, and add local perspectives and context. A multiple narrator emerges—distributed authorship in which different voices jointly produce and rearrange meaning. At the micro level this appears as reactive mini-plots in comments, memes, and short videos; at the meso level as communities around themes and hashtags; at the macro level as durable images of 'what matters' to a given society.

Cognitive schemas form the invisible infrastructure of this process. Memory activates ready-made models—'crisis', 'saviour', 'culprit', 'victim'—that connect fragments and lend them predictability. Journalistic formulas, visual clichés, and narrative roles facilitate recognition but also narrow possible interpretations. When a schema becomes dominant, it begins to organise not only storytelling but perception itself, pushing beyond its frame what cannot be readily described. Time, too, is recoded. The classical plot with a clear beginning, climax, and end gives way to a flow in which endings are temporary interruptions and new 'episodes' easily reactivate old themes. Individual micro-narratives often appear before they are configured into plot; the burden of stitching shifts to audiences, who construct their own 'meaning montage' through links, playlists, threads, and lists. This makes the meso level critical: without mediating frames, multiplying fragments struggle to acquire public significance. Narrative identity is also built through oppositions—'us' and 'them', 'victim' and 'culprit', 'expert' and 'witness'. Media roles stabilise the characters of public time and ease plot-following, yet they also harden viewpoints. Such oppositions are embedded in macro-narratives of order, morality, justice, modernity, and tradition, which function as background maps for interpreting current events.

The media field, understood as a space of professional rules and power relations, influences all levels. Decisions about what becomes 'news', which voices gain visibility, and how the temporal rhythm of the flow is organised shape the conditions under which micro-narratives live or disappear. Increased participation by the 'ordinary person' brings an authentic register and an effect of trust, but it is often pre-framed by the expectations of format: spontaneity is staged, and testimony is assembled into familiar dramaturgy. When analysing these processes, a secondary narrative is inevitably constructed: a corpus is selected, beginnings and endings are delineated, protagonists are named—institutions, media, publics—and conflicts are arranged among themes, interests, and interpretations. Analysis itself moves along the micro–meso–macro axis: from close attention to the single text, through comparison of versions across platforms, to mapping long thematic lines. It is in the synchronisation of these levels that one sees how a fragment becomes a plot and a plot becomes a social image. Formation and levels of narrative thus describe the grammar of contemporary public life: fragments that are assembled, communities that frame, mechanisms that accelerate or slow, roles that stabilise meaning. Where there is flow, there is montage; where there is montage, there is narrative. At the heart of this process lies the tension between the multiplicity of voices and the need for shared meaning—a tension that media culture manages by turning narrative levels into an architecture of public understanding.

Media Narratives as Collective Fate

'News and truth are not the same thing, and must be clearly distinguished.'
— Walter Lippmann

In his book[19] The Power of the News (1997), Henning Röhl examines how the media, rather than reflecting reality, begin to produce it, turning news into a mechanism of collective self-perception and identity. Under conditions of modern publicity, the boundary between fact and narrative gradually dissolves. History is no longer written primarily by institutions, but by information flows that continuously generate versions of reality. A thesis repeated often enough and reinforced by 'expert' voices hardens into public conviction, shaping the emotional and political climate of entire communities. In this way news does not merely inform; it moulds

[19] Röhl, H. (1997) The Power of News. Sofia: Faculty of Journalism and Mass Communication.

belonging and defines who is ‘inside’ and who is ‘outside’ the horizon of collective fate. Röhl traces this process through the experience of reunified Germany after 1989, where the media environment became an arena for transition between two different ideologies of consensus: the state propaganda of the East and the liberal contractualism of the West. In this collision journalism loses its mediating function and becomes an actor on the stage, directing its own audience. Democracy begins to be governed not through discussion, but through spectacle. News ceases to be an occasion for public conversation and becomes a ready-made script that assigns roles and emotions. This shift is both political and psychological: the more the media strive to manufacture consensus, the more deeply they divide society.

The symptoms appear most clearly in media crises—wars, terrorist attacks, migration waves. In such moments the media perform a dual role: on the one hand seeking unity and a moral centre, on the other becoming engines of polarisation. When facts are filtered through ratings and political correctness, audiences sense manipulation and trust collapses. In this vacuum arises the demand for new myths: conspiracies, accusations against the ‘lying press’, suspicion towards experts and institutions. Media narratives thus turn into a form of civic religion, in which people believe not because of evidence, but because through these stories they find identity and belonging. Collective fate, forged by the media, manifests itself through repetition. Each cycle of scandal and reaction reproduces a familiar dramaturgy: revelation, outrage, counter-accusation, new revelation. Emotional rhythm replaces argument. Each side in the conflict maintains its own media pantheon—its heroes, martyrs, and demons. This is not merely a struggle over information, but over moral legitimacy: who is good, who is the victim, who is guilty. National history is rewritten daily, not by historians, but by editors, commentators, and algorithms. In this process ‘scientific’ knowledge often functions as ornament rather than correction. Statistics, indices, and expert assessments are cited as final verdicts, without explanation of their methodology. When it later emerges that sources were commissioned or biased, the damage extends beyond a single outlet to trust in the very idea of knowledge. In place of shared meanings arise parallel realities, each group believing its own version of the facts. Society begins to perceive itself as a stage of incompatible truths.

Röhl sees no solution in nostalgia for journalism’s ‘golden age’, but in restoring its critical function. Admitting error, transparency of sources, verifiability of data, and a clear distinction between comment and fact are, for him, forms of public responsibility. Media power must be subjected to the same scrutiny that it applies to political power. Only in this way can news regain its status as a common good rather than an instrument of emotional governance. Today’s publicity, dependent on social platforms, makes these conclusions even more urgent. Social networks have accelerated everything Röhl describes: the cycle of outrage is shorter, the scenes of collective identity more frequent. Every user is a potential editor and co-author of the ‘national plot’. This produces a sense of participation, but also of exhaustion: people experience history as a series of moral tests that never end. Ultimately Röhl’s message reads as a warning. When news becomes the primary mechanism of public feeling, it acquires a power comparable to religion. It can create solidarity, but it can also tear society apart. Without the counterweight of critical reason and transparency, the media will continue to manufacture collective fate according to a ready-made script—between algorithm, interest, and ideological loyalty. True democracy begins not with applause, but with a question: who is writing our story, and in whose name is it being told?

How News Produces Reality

'The real environment is altogether too big, too complex, and too fleeting for direct acquaintance. We have to reconstruct it on a simpler model before we can manage with it.'

— Walter Lippmann

The book The Power of the News examines how the media do not merely reflect reality but actively produce it—emotionally charged, dramatised, and durably imprinted on the public imagination. News, in this account, is not a mirror of events but a scenario that gives form, rhythm, and meaning to reality while it is still unfolding. A thesis repeated often enough and legitimised through 'expert' quotations ceases to appear as one version among others and hardens into fact. This transformation of narrative into reality lies at the core of the power the media exercise over how societies feel the world. The television era described by Henning Röhl marks the moment when the camera assumes the function of collective consciousness. News no longer simply informs; it offers a ready-made emotional structure—images, sound effects, commentary, and symbolic frames that organise viewers' reactions. When context is missing, it is replaced by genre: war appears as action cinema, politics as serial drama, tragedies as moral tales with clear heroes and villains. The viewer does not so much experience facts as participate in a staged emotion. Röhl points to the Gulf War as an example, where 'live broadcasts' and filtered images created an impression of immediacy while in fact presenting carefully selected visual material. Television logic imposes a rhythm on history: every event must have a peak, an explanation, and a moral conclusion. Repeated day after day, this structure gradually turns complex realities into simple templates. Viewers become accustomed to perceiving the world through dramaturgical arcs—good versus evil, victory versus defeat, justice versus guilt. The more these models are repeated, the more real they appear. Politicians begin to speak in television rhythms, analysts shape their opinions according to audience expectations, and public debates become battles between competing plots. Memory is no longer built through documents but through images that generate pride, anger, or shame. Emotion becomes the criterion of truth.

Röhl warns that this process is not merely a professional deformation of the media but a structural transformation in how societies produce meaning. Increasingly, the media replace real dialogue with its illusion. Instead of serving as a platform for argument, they become an arena of spectacle in which conflict is carefully maintained to sustain attention. The result is a society that reacts but does not understand, that feels intensely but thinks weakly. When such narratives are repeated over years, they form national emotional profiles. One country may define itself through pride in its 'successes', another through shame over a 'guilty past'. Each generation inherits not only history but also the feelings with which that history was told. This transmitted emotion is the true 'power of the news': the capacity to determine which feelings are legitimate in public life and which must remain suppressed. Over time this mechanism leads to a crisis of trust. When viewers begin to sense the direction behind the images, they reject not only the media but the very idea of objectivity. It is here that the old German term Lügenpresse—'lying press'—reappears. Röhl stresses, however, that accusation does not solve the problem; it merely shifts attention from structure to moral blame. Real change begins when the media acknowledge their role in constructing emotional reality and assume responsibility for it.

In the digital age the mechanisms Röhl describes accelerate. Social media algorithms automatically amplify content that provokes anger, outrage, or delight. Emotion becomes a unit of attention, and attention a new form of currency. Each viewer turns into a co-author of the narrative by sharing and commenting on versions of reality that resonate with personal feeling. As a result, the media do not simply reflect public moods but multiply them and seal them within echo chambers of emotion. In this world news functions simultaneously as instrument and stage

of the collective imagination. It creates heroes and enemies, assigns ready-made roles and scripts through which people experience belonging. The viewer is no longer a passive witness but an active participant in the spectacle of reality—liking, commenting, sharing, taking offence, and thereby continuing the story. Yet the deeper society immerses itself in this emotionally produced reality, the harder it becomes to distinguish between shared experience and manipulation. Röhl's message is clear: news is the most influential form of artistic production of our time—it creates the world as we wish to feel it. The responsibility of both journalist and audience is to recognise this mechanism and use it consciously. Only when the media cease to function as factories of emotion and return to the craft of context can news once again become a space of understanding rather than merely a stage of impact. The new digital stage operates on a simple but unfailing principle: angry people click more, and this dramatic reality produced by news turns the viewer into a participant and actor in the very events that appear to be merely observed.

Narratives Between War and Truth

'In wartime, truth is so precious that she should always be attended by a bodyguard of lies.'
— Winston S. Churchill

Henning Röhl examines censorship and propaganda as the two most powerful instruments through which the media can alter the very meaning of truth. For him, war is the moment when news finally ceases to function as a means of information and becomes a weapon for governing perception. Under conditions of conflict, the media do not simply show the world; they construct it by selecting images, words, and emphases that shape collective emotion. Röhl recalls the well-known observation that 'the first casualty of every war is truth', but adds that in contemporary democracies this sacrifice is not made through crude lies, but through carefully staged truth. During the Gulf War, journalists found themselves inside a system in which access to information was strictly controlled. Reports were subjected to military clearance, images were reviewed before broadcast, and any doubt cast on the official line was interpreted as disloyalty. Frontline journalism was replaced by 'embedded' correspondents who could see only what they were permitted to see. War became a television spectacle in which viewers were offered meticulously curated images: glowing missile trails, precise strikes, and confident briefings by official spokespeople. The real victims remained invisible, and tragedy was replaced by an aesthetic of destruction. Television thus created the illusion of a 'clean war'—technologically perfect and morally justified.

Censorship, Röhl stresses, does not always operate through prohibition. It can appear as 'soft propaganda', through a language of consensus and editorial filters that sustain a particular emotional frame. Journalists often fail to notice that they have become part of a propaganda system because they believe they are serving the 'public interest'. In reality, this interest is defined by political priorities and by the logic of spectacle. When the morality of war is built on the idea of a 'humanitarian operation', news ceases to transmit reality and begins to transmit reassurance. Röhl notes that propaganda in democratic societies is more effective precisely because it does not look like propaganda. It does not instruct people what to think, but how to feel. Television images invite identification with one side and present its moral righteousness as self-evident. In this process the viewer is not merely an observer, but an accomplice—a participant in a ritual of collective conviction in which facts are subordinated to mood. What appears as spontaneous public reaction is in fact a carefully sustained emotional script. In Germany this mechanism provokes strong resistance. Journalists and intellectuals begin to speak

of ‘the management of truth’, of a new form of political censorship operating under the guise of democratic transparency. Posters appear on the streets of Hamburg and Berlin declaring ‘Censorship is a lie’, and public debate shifts from the war itself to the right to information. These protests express not only distrust of official sources, but fear that democracy itself may be built upon the control of perception.

Röhl distinguishes three main levels of censorship. The first is military: direct control over access to information and filtering of images. The second is social: the belief that ‘too much truth’ could harm national morale or provoke panic. The third is political: the concealment of negotiations, deals, and strategic decisions that might compromise the image of a ‘just cause’. Together, these forms create a comprehensive environment of manipulated publicity in which transparency is little more than a façade. This gives rise to the phenomenon of ‘video reality’, in which the media do not merely transmit events but replace them. The world sees war through the lenses of CNN and the BBC, which become universal narrators of history. Even critical voices attempting to expose manipulation struggle to escape its logic, because they continue to reproduce it through citation and repetition. Critique itself becomes part of the spectacle, and exposure another episode in the drama of informational power. Röhl identifies here the deep irony of contemporary public life: the more society demands ‘truth’, the more dependent it becomes on its media forms. Truth is no longer an event, but an image; no longer evidence, but a feeling of credibility. Viewers learn to believe what appears convincing, even when they know it is staged. Röhl concludes that the true power of the media lies not in lying, but in defining the frame of reality itself. Censorship and propaganda are not remnants of the past, but permanent mechanisms of social control that turn watching into believing. Between war and truth stands the media narrative—a carefully arranged spectacle that makes us feel we are seeing the world, while in fact we are watching our own conviction projected back at us from the screen.

Journalism, Truth, and Humanity

‘Journalism is printing what someone else does not want printed: everything else is public relations.’
— George Orwell

In the concluding chapter of The Power of the News, Henning Röhl raises the question of the moral condition of journalism in post-war Europe and the spiritual crisis of the contemporary reporter. After long decades of controlled information and ideological propaganda, society finds itself formally liberated from censorship, yet still unprepared to bear the full responsibility of free speech. At the centre lies the tension between truth and spectacle, between the need for information and the desire for emotional entertainment. New freedom exposes old habits of obedience and fear of difference, and the media, rather than healing these distortions, often reproduce them. After the reunification of Germany, Leipzig—once a symbol of German journalism—becomes a metaphor for lost confidence. A city that had been a crossroads of ideas and communication now carries the silence of a society that has experienced what Röhl calls ‘deafness after propaganda’. Although the old institutions have vanished, the spirit of controlled thinking remains alive. Many journalists, formed in an era of ideological discipline, cannot free themselves from internal censorship. They continue to think in categories of collective guilt and caution, measuring dignity not by the courage to speak the truth, but by the ability not to offend anyone.

New freedom does not automatically lead to renewal. On the contrary, it reveals professional insecurity and a lack of moral direction. Reporters fear taking a position, and the desire to be 'objective' often turns into an excuse for indifference. Objectivity is replaced by neutrality, and neutrality by silence. As a result, the journalist becomes a powerless witness who refuses to think in order not to be accused of bias. The opposite extreme is journalism of personal experience. After the collapse of ideological models, many embrace subjectivism as a sign of freedom, but this leads to a new form of narcissism. The reporter places themselves at the centre of the narrative, and truth is reduced to personal impression. Journalism turns into confession, and fact into emotion. This substitution of mission with individual style creates an illusion of authenticity while undermining moral responsibility. When personal opinion becomes the standard, truth becomes a matter of temperament rather than verification. Against this background, Röhl defends a more conservative ideal of journalism as a service to humanity. Conservatism here does not mean submission, but respect for words and for the audience. Information should not frighten or manipulate, but illuminate. Journalism must refuse the language of fear, preserve the dignity of communication, and resist turning news into spectacle. True professionalism lies not in producing reactions, but in offering meaning.

Television, the most influential medium of mass communication, becomes the emblem of this dilemma. It makes the viewer a witness to everything while depriving them of the possibility to act. The screen replaces the event with its visibility, experience with image. History is consumed rather than understood. There is comfort in this, because images create an illusion of belonging, but also danger: people cease to think critically and begin to believe what appears convincing. Television reality does not offer truth, but a feeling of truth. Röhl distinguishes several types of journalists at the end of his analysis—some seek humanity through closeness to the audience, others through distance and irony, others through intellectual restraint. Regardless of style, all face the same moral obligation: not to dissolve into the mass and not to allow themselves to be used. The true journalist is neither preacher nor idol, but a person who preserves humanity in a world that informs itself faster than it thinks. The conclusion reads at once as confession and appeal: the journalist must spread humanity and even joy, remain critical without becoming cynical, and defend the dignity of words without yielding to indifference. Truth is not always spectacular; it is often quiet and even inconvenient, but it is precisely this that distinguishes service to society from service to interests. In a world where the media can manipulate and deceive, everything depends on the human being behind the camera and the pen—on their ability to remain human when the noise of information drowns out the voice of truth. Röhl thus concludes his study with the conviction that the future of journalism lies not in technology or form, but in the individual who chooses whether language will serve power or humanity.

Rethinking the 'Grand Narratives'

> *'Time becomes human time to the extent that it is organized after the manner of a narrative.'*
> *— Paul Ricœur*

In his essay[20] 'Time, Narrative, Politics', the philosopher Jacques Rancière examines the relationship between narrative, time, and power, showing that every form of public discourse—from history and politics to journalism—operates according to the logic of fiction. The way

[20] Rancière, J. (2022) Modern Times: Time, Narrative, Politics. London: Verso Books.

events are arranged is never neutral: it determines who has the right to speak, what counts as an event, and which roles participants occupy within the shared plot of the world. This insight is crucial for understanding twenty-first-century media, where the viewer is no longer merely a recipient but a co-author of the narrative. The shift from ‘grand narratives’ to interactive, fragmented, and collective forms of storytelling reflects precisely this transformation—a redistribution of power over time, images, and words. Contemporary media narratives are no longer built on stable structures with a clear beginning, development, and end, but on movement, into which anyone may enter. News, social networks, and digital platforms form a web of micro-narratives that intertwine, comment on one another, and are constantly reworked. Voices once excluded from the stage can now participate in shaping the plot through a post, a video, or a comment. The viewer is not an external observer but an actor within public time, which Rancière describes as a ‘politics of narrative’—a distribution of the visible, the sayable, and the thinkable. Interactivity introduces a new temporality. Whereas the grand narratives of modernity sustained the illusion of historical necessity, the digital age replaces this teleology with an open-ended process. Events are broadcast and rewritten in real time, and audience feedback alters their very meaning. The ending is no longer a conclusion but a pause before a new beginning. The narrative remains alive through comments, reactions, and alternative versions that shift the boundary between fact and interpretation. This constitutes a redistribution of time itself—not only who speaks, but when one speaks, when one listens, and when one may interrupt or continue the story.

Twenty-first-century media turn the viewer into a co-author because narratives are now produced collectively. The reporter or institutional source no longer dictates final meaning; that position is shared with networked communities that add their own perspectives, images, memes, and interpretations. As a result, the new media drama unfolds horizontally rather than vertically—not from author to audience, but from audience to audience. Each reaction becomes a move in a game of meanings that keeps the story alive. Interactivity also functions as a new form of collective memory. While traditional media organised time as a linear flow—day by day, edition by edition—today’s platforms allow constant return, commentary, and remixing of the past. Old events are revived in new contexts, and the archive becomes an active participant in the present. This dynamic dissolves the old distinction between ‘history’ and ‘news’: everything can be retold, from another angle, with a different rhythm and different protagonists. In this new media world, the viewer is both actor and editor. The decision of what to share, how to frame it, when and before whom, becomes part of the creative process. Even silence or refusal to participate acquires the meaning of a gesture within the shared plot. A new type of public sphere thus emerges, in which attention becomes a resource and participation a form of power. Narrative ceases to be merely a vehicle for information and becomes an instrument of self-understanding and belonging.

Rancière emphasises that the politics of narrative does not lie in producing a new all-encompassing story, but in opening spaces where time and voices can be shared. This is precisely what occurs in new media: the viewer claims the right to begin, to interrupt, to comment, and to reorder events. Each public constructs its own rhythm and its own sense of temporal justice—who speaks, who waits, and who decides when the story ends. In conclusion, rethinking the grand narratives in the spirit of Jacques Rancière leads to a profound transformation of media culture. Narrative no longer belongs to the few who control access to the stage, but to the many who participate. Interactivity does not merely refresh the form of news or cinema; it transforms the very idea of the audience. In the world of new media, every viewer has a role—not because they are invited, but because they are already inside the story they are collectively creating in real time.

1.2. The Mass Audience

Media Narratives and the Audience's 'Self'

'Stories can expand our sense of what is possible for ourselves.'
— Martha Nussbaum

In the article[21] by Tal-Or and Raspurker-Apfeld (2025), 'The Impact of Media Narratives on the Audience's Self: Immediate and Delayed Effects', the authors examine how inspiring film narratives reshape viewers' self-perception, asking whether this influence is fleeting or enduring over time. The experimental findings suggest that stories centred on overcoming adversity and achieving goals do not merely produce short-lived emotional uplift, but leave a deeper imprint on self-efficacy and motivation. At the core of the analysis lies the question of how identification with characters transforms the viewer's inner world. When individuals immerse themselves in a narrative, a process of assimilation takes place: the viewer temporarily adopts the traits, emotions, and perspective of the protagonist. This psychological fusion renders another's experience personally meaningful and leads to an increase in implicit self-esteem. After the film ends, however, a return to everyday reality may produce a sense of contrast, in which the hero's success appears unattainable and momentarily undermines confidence. The experimental data indicate that this apparent decline is often an artefact of repeated measurement rather than a genuine reduction in self-esteem.

The lasting impact of inspiring narratives derives from the mechanism of identification. This process does not end with the closing credits but continues within the viewer's thought, as scenes, inner dialogues, and images are revisited in search of personal relevance. Such retrospective imaginative engagement prolongs the narrative's influence and allows emotional experience to crystallise into cognitive change. Over time, activated representations of determination, perseverance, and agency are integrated into the individual's self-conception. A decisive factor is the type of story being told. Narratives that depict struggle and gradual achievement reinforce inner confidence and cultivate a sense of personal strength. By contrast, stories that present effortless success or brilliance without struggle often produce a negative contrast effect: the viewer distances themselves from the character and feels less capable. This distinction highlights that media narratives do not operate automatically, but exert influence according to their structure, tone, and experiential credibility.

Particularly revealing is the dynamic between immediate and delayed effects. Immediately after viewing, there is a brief emotional elevation associated with excitement and sympathy for the protagonist. Later, following a period of reflection, a deeper interpretative phase emerges, during which viewers relate the narrative to their own lives. It is at this stage that motivation and self-efficacy increase—the sense that one can confront obstacles and act effectively. This 'second impulse' proves more significant than the initial enthusiasm, because it fosters a durable orientation towards action. The psychological model of the active 'Self' explains why the impact of inspiring stories intensifies after a pause. Narratives do not create entirely new personal traits, but activate existing ones—such as persistence or belief in one's own capacities. When attention shifts from the screen to personal goals, these aspects become more accessible and function as drivers of motivation.

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[21] Tal-Or, N. and Razpurker-Apfeld, I. (2025). The Impact of Media Narratives on the Audience's Self: Immediate and Delayed Effects. Journalism and Media, 6(3), p.107. doi:https://doi.org/10.3390/journalmedia6030107.

The practical implications of these findings are considerable. In education, therapy, and coaching, inspiring narratives may be deployed as tools for stimulating personal engagement and confidence. The most effective approach combines brief emotional exposure with subsequent reflection—discussion, writing, or the formulation of concrete steps. In this way, identification is translated into a personal strategy for action rather than remaining a momentary emotional state. The study also delineates the limits of the effect: implicit self-esteem is more susceptible to change than explicit self-evaluation, since it rests on subconscious associations, whereas global self-worth is more stable. Nonetheless, even modest shifts in self-perception can encourage greater decisiveness and initiative.

In conclusion, inspiring media narratives do more than entertain or console; they possess the capacity to alter human self-evaluation and behaviour. When viewers recognise themselves in a character, the on-screen experience becomes a personal one, activating a sense of capability and a desire to act. The screen thus functions not only as a mirror but as a catalyst for inner transformation—a medium through which narrative continues to live within a person's thoughts and decisions long after the final frame. In the era of online media, the effect of identification is no longer collective but profoundly personalised: each viewer experiences the story through their own biography and responds individually. The mass audience as a homogeneous entity dissolves, replaced by a multitude of distinct participants who actively engage with messages, comment, share, and rewrite the narrative. Media thus cease to operate as a one-way channel of influence and become a network of individual mirrors, in which each viewer constructs their own version of the story.

Theory of Narrative

'Fabula, story, and text are the three levels of narrative; each has its own characteristics and functions, but none can exist independently of the others.'
— Mieke Bal

In the book[22] by Mieke Bal and Christine van Boheemen, Narratology: An Introduction to Narrative Theory (2009), narrative is presented as a complex system of structures, signs, and meanings through which culture tells, interprets, and shares its experience. Narratology does not seek a universal formula for all stories; instead, it develops an analytical toolkit that enables the researcher to understand how meaning emerges from the relationship between form, content, and the act of reception. It examines the ways in which narratives, regardless of medium—literature, film, painting, or architecture—construct sequences of events that generate meanings and values. The primary aim is to describe how these narrative structures function and how meaning arises from their interaction. The theoretical framework distinguishes three core concepts—text, story, and fabula—as interdependent levels of narrative organisation. The text is the material form composed of linguistic, visual, or auditory signs; the story is the specific content conveyed by those signs; and the fabula is the abstract logical and chronological sequence of events that constitutes the narrative's semantic foundation. Events, agents, time, and space form the matrix from which the story takes shape, while the manner of its telling—order, perspective, emphasis—determines its effect. Focalisation, or point of view, is decisive, because it structures perception and emotional engagement for the reader or viewer. The narrator who conveys the

[22] Bal, M. and Christine Van Boheemen (2009). Narratology : introduction to the theory of narrative. Toronto ; London: University Of Toronto Press.

story is not identical with the author. The narrator is a fictional agent constructed within the text, organising the narrative and determining the distance between events and their representation. At times this narrator remains invisible; at others, the narrator comments actively on what is happening or blends with the voices of the characters. Any shift in the position of the narrating subject transforms the meaning of the story, which makes the analysis of narrative voice and focalisation central to understanding the text. At the same time, the theory insists that description and interpretation are inseparable. Every reading is an interpretation, and every analysis presupposes a point of view. For this reason, narratology does not aspire to objectivity but to communicability—the possibility that different interpretations can be articulated in a shared language and subjected to discussion. This is its democratic foundation: interpretation is not a final verdict, but a dialogical process in which understanding is built through the comparison of perspectives. This intersubjectivity turns the theory not merely into a method, but into a cultural practice that connects individual experience with collective knowledge. Narrative texts are not solely linguistic phenomena; they encompass any form of sign organisation that expresses a sequence of meanings. Comics, films, or even architectural spaces may therefore be analysed as narratives if they arrange events, actions, and points of view into a meaningful chain. This breadth of applicability demonstrates that narrative is not confined to language but is a universal cultural mechanism for transmitting experience and values. In this sense, narrative theory is not a dogma, but a tool for investigating the diversity of ways in which culture thinks through stories. The interpretation of narrative is always conditioned by cultural context and by membership in particular interpretive communities. Different readers share social assumptions and conventions that shape what is perceived as plausible or significant. Consequently, any story may generate multiple legitimate readings that do not cancel one another out, but enrich each other. This multiplicity does not dissolve meaning; it deepens it, reflecting the complexity of cultural communication in which every act of understanding is also an act of creation. Narrative, therefore, is not only a structure but a process—a dynamic interaction between narrator and listener, between system and event, between culture and subject. The text is not a neutral container of meaning, but an active mediator that shapes how reality is perceived and experienced. Through this mediation, stories do not merely reflect life; they recreate it, granting it order, significance, and emotional logic. Narrative theory reveals that storytelling is inseparable from thinking: through stories, cultures construct their models of truth, justice, and identity. In the contemporary era of digital mediality, these principles acquire a new dimension. Narrative is no longer a fixed text, but a networked process in which viewers, readers, and users become co-authors. Online platforms turn interpretation into a collective activity, and the boundaries between narrator and audience dissolve. In this context, the logic of interpretation described by Mieke Bal converges with the logic of contemporary media narrative—a world in which every story is retold, rearranged, and rethought by its participants. In this new media environment, participants are no longer passive spectators but co-agents who consciously play a role in the scenario of narration itself.

Fictional Characters, Real Effects

'Characters are not persons; they are constructions made up of a limited number of traits.'
— Mieke Bal

In Narratology, the character is understood not as a real being but as a semiotic construction—an effect produced by the arrangement of events, points of view, and signs, which nevertheless

exerts a real influence on the thinking, emotions, and behaviour of the audience. Narrative, whether literary, cinematic, or digital, generates in the mind of the reader or viewer a sense of the presence of a living person with whom one can empathise, identify, or against whom one can take a position. This illusion is so persuasive that the boundary between fictional construction and real effect becomes blurred: characters may be invented, but the effects of their existence on audiences are entirely real. The distinction between actant and character is fundamental. The actant is a structural position within the fabula—a function that performs actions or undergoes events—whereas the character is the semantic product of those actions, endowed with apparent psychological and moral depth. When readers begin to treat characters as 'real people', what Mieke Bal describes as the anthropomorphic reflex comes into play: the human tendency to project consciousness, intention, and motivation onto textual constructions. It is precisely this tendency that makes artistic and media figures so powerful. The audience responds to fiction as if it were engaging with real individuals. Narrative succeeds in eliciting compassion, anger, love, or hatred, even though its participants are composed of words, images, and editorial decisions. Narrative analysis shows that this effect is not incidental but constitutive of storytelling itself. Characters function as mediators between text and audience: they channel attention, determine the focus of identification, and set the emotional rhythm of reception. When a figure is presented with sufficient consistency and repetition, it acquires a form of psychological autonomy in the audience's mind. Viewers often discuss the 'actions' or 'character' of fictional figures as if speaking about acquaintances, which demonstrates that fictional constructions develop a social life beyond the text. This dynamic is especially visible in contemporary media environments, where characters migrate across formats and genres—from television series to social media, from news narratives to memes. Even when audiences know that a figure is fictional, they actively participate in sustaining it through comments, sharing, and remixing. The character thus becomes a cultural agent, capable of provoking real emotional and social responses—ranging from empathy and mobilisation to adoration or moral panic. Contemporary media psychology confirms that fictional experiences activate the same neural networks involved in real empathy, and that people form durable attachments to characters who have never existed. The key insight of narratological analysis is that these effects do not arise from the 'reality' of the character, but from the structure of the narrative that makes the character possible. The fictional person is the result of a carefully organised system of repetitions, relations, and transformations. Repetition stabilises traits and habits, relations position the character in relation to others and to value systems, and transformations create the sense of development and experience. In this way, the text sustains the illusion of psychology without possessing a psyche. In this sense, the effects of characters are not illusory; they are socially real responses to a collective simulation. Problems emerge when fictional figures are interpreted through real psychological categories. Interpretation then slips into anthropomorphism, attributing unconscious motives or moral choices that belong not to the text, but to the reader. Methodologically, it is more precise to analyse how the narrative organises possible meanings—what it allows one to think, feel, and judge—rather than to 'diagnose' the behaviour of non-existent persons. This analytical distance does not weaken identification; it renders it more conscious. It demonstrates that fictional roles can have material consequences: they alter attitudes, shape social expectations, and even influence political behaviour. Media characters—from cinematic figures to influencers who actively construct their own personas—function as mirrors in which audiences project and rehearse possible identities. Even when these roles are entirely invented, they affect how people behave, communicate, and think about themselves and others. Ultimately, characters in narrative are fictional entities with real effects: they organise attention, distribute sympathies, and encode values that travel beyond the boundaries of the text. In the contemporary media landscape, where

every user can become the protagonist of their own story, these effects become even more tangible. Characters no longer live solely on the page or the screen; they are embodied in the behaviour of their audiences, who consciously or unconsciously begin to play roles within the script of the larger media narrative. Defining fiction as reality inevitably produces real consequences. Thomas's theorem states that if people define situations as real, they are real in their consequences. This principle explains the power of media narrative to become a script that shapes perceptions, decisions, and behaviour.

Logic of Interpretation

'Events are transitions from one state to another. Without events there is no narrative.'
— Mieke Bal

In the work of Mieke Bal and Christine van Boheemen, the logic of interpretation is developed as a process of understanding how the fabula—the abstract chain of events underlying every concrete act of storytelling—structures change. The fabula is not merely an arrangement of occurrences but a network of relations between actions, agents, time, and space that produces a meaningful order. It is so closely aligned with the syntax of language and with the logic of human behaviour that it can be applied beyond literature, to cinema, journalism, or social processes. Every narrative requires a balance between stable elements (actors, places, objects) and dynamic processes (events). Without events, actors remain inert; without actors, events lack direction. The analysis of the fabula therefore requires both distinguishing and integrating these two levels in order to trace the movement of transformation. An event signifies a transition—a movement from one state to another, caused or experienced by acting agents. It is always part of a sequence, because only within a sequence does its function become legible. There is no universal criterion by which a fact can be defined as an event; its significance depends on the relations it establishes with other elements of the narrative. Meaning does not reside in the isolated action but in the way actions are woven into a causal chain. Roland Barthes offers a key analytical tool through the distinction between functional and non-functional events. Functional events advance the fabula by introducing choice, change, or consequence. Non-functional events construct atmosphere, rhythm, or background without altering the course of the story. This distinction is analytical rather than aesthetic: a minor detail may carry decisive structural weight, while a spectacular scene may remain purely decorative. Functionality belongs not to effect but to position within the narrative chain.

Another fundamental principle is confrontation, in which action presupposes at least two agents—active and passive—even if one remains only implicit. This structure of subject, predicate, and object generates tension and supplies fabular energy. Confrontation does not necessarily imply violence; it may take the form of dialogue, doubt, or emotional proximity, as long as it produces change. Claude Bremond proposes a more dynamic model: the narrative cycle, which describes the development of the fabula as a sequence of possibility, realisation, and result. Every story begins with a potential—a lack, a need, or a threat—that motivates action. The action may succeed or fail, and the result opens a new cycle. In this way, the fabula unfolds as a succession of improvements and deteriorations that define the logic of change. Even failure is productive, as it generates a new virtuality and a new direction. This model allows different narratives to be compared without erasing their specificity.

Initial states in narrative are rarely neutral; there is always a lack, disagreement, or tension that sets the movement in motion. As the story progresses, sequences of improvement and decline

alternate, and the style of the text determines how this dynamic is perceived. At times major events remain unspoken, while minor gestures carry the emotional weight. In other cases, a fatalistic structure absorbs the characters, turning accidental details into signs of inevitability. Form thus reflects interpretative logic—the way the world is presented as ordered, chaotic, or cyclical. Additional parameters complete this model: who acts, what type of contact is established (mental, verbal, bodily), how time is organised (simultaneity, succession, ellipsis), and how spatial oppositions are deployed (inside/outside, above/below, here/there). Combined, these factors outline the structure of the text as a system of interactions whose meaning can be discussed rather than merely intuited. The logic of interpretation consists precisely in this transformation of personal perception into shareable analysis, enabling different but argued readings. It is crucial to recognise that structure does not exist within the text itself but emerges in the act of reading. Analysis is a construct, built upon selected data and contexts, and its value depends on the transparency of that selection. Narrative models are useful when they function as tools rather than dogmas: they render visible the logic of change without reducing the richness of the text.

In conclusion, the fabula is a system of interrelated objects and processes through which narrative organises transitions from one state to another. Events acquire meaning only through their function and position within the chain; confrontations generate dynamism; and cyclical models reveal the regularities of transformation. The logic of interpretation thus demonstrates not merely how stories are read, but how stories themselves think—about possibility and failure, cause and consequence, and human action as a form of meaning. It is through this logic that contemporary media narrative continues to model reality, turning experience into a scenario of shared participation and interpretation.

Worlds in Motion

'Transmedia storytelling represents a process where integral elements of a fiction get dispersed systematically across multiple delivery channels for the purpose of creating a unified and coordinated entertainment experience.'
— Henry Jenkins

In the book[23] by Marie-Laure Ryan and Jan-Noël Thon, Storyworlds Across Media: Toward a Media-Conscious Narratology (Narrative Limits) (2014), the authors examine how stories are transferred, transformed, and developed across different media forms, creating a new type of narrative environment—one in which stories do not conclude but continue to unfold in multiple directions. How do stories stretch, change, and recombine across media? In contemporary culture, the narrative world displaces the story itself as the central object of interest. Films, television series, books, comics, and video games are no longer self-contained texts but interconnected fragments of larger universes to which audiences return repeatedly. Entry into such a universe does not require instruction but recognition: characters, places, and rules are already familiar, and pleasure arises from discovering new possibilities within a known framework. This shift from 'story' to 'world' marks a new stage in the development of narratology. Stories are no longer closed structures but open systems that move across platforms. The world becomes a carrier of meaning that can be expanded and rearranged by different media. Within the same

[23] Ryan, M.-L. (2014). Storyworlds across media : toward a media-conscious narratology. Lincoln ; London: University Of Nebraska Press.

narrative space, cinematic, literary, and interactive versions may coexist, each adding its own layer to the shared configuration. This principle of movement ‘across media’ reveals a new understanding of narrative as a process that combines creation, experience, and participation. Contemporary storyworlds possess a flexibility that allows for endless continuation. They are sustained by collective memory and by interaction between authors and audiences. Once a universe is perceived as coherent and convincing, it continues to live beyond its original text. Audiences begin to expand it through commentary, remixes, fan fiction, and social networks. The boundaries between professional and amateur creation blur, and viewers themselves become co-authors. Stories cease to be merely told; they are inhabited, experienced, and shared. Media convergence, often described as the merging of formats, finds its true meaning in shared storyworlds. When different media ‘orbit’ the same world—such as Middle-earth, Gotham, or the Jedi galaxy—each contributes its own perspective, genre, or mode of perception. Film unfolds space through image and sound; literature through interior monologue and detail; games through action and choice. Each medium has its own narrative power, but the full richness of the world emerges only when these powers converge. The storyworld becomes a ‘shared space of imagination’ in which media collaborate rather than compete.

The way audiences perceive narrative also changes. Today the viewer is not merely a consumer but an active participant in the production of meaning. Interpretation becomes a game of collecting and arranging fragments from different media—trailers, novels, comments, post-credit scenes, fan pages. The storyworld lives simultaneously in media texts and in the consciousness of the audience. It is sustained by continuous exchange between fiction and reality, between imagined experience and real emotional responses. This dynamic reveals a new aesthetics of cultural participation. Stories no longer belong to individual authors but to networks of participants who create and reorder the world through their interpretations. Fictional space becomes social: it organises communities, rituals, and values. For this reason, the effects of storyworlds are real—they shape collective imagination and even human behaviour. Ultimately, worlds that move across media demonstrate that narrative is not merely an artistic form but a mechanism of cultural existence. Stories become living systems in which media, audiences, and authors act together. These shifting worlds sustain an ongoing dialogue between reality and fiction, in which viewers participate as co-creators of the shared imaginary. Fictional worlds function as engines of cultural imagination because they live beyond plot—while stories end, worlds continue to branch. As one director observes, once stories were presented, then characters; today, worlds are presented, because a world can carry countless stories across different media. The aim is not a new dogma, but a media-conscious perspective on narrative—one that understands how worlds move across media and how we move within them.

Media-Conscious Narratology

‘Storyworlds are mental models of the situations and events described in a narrative. They support our ability to understand and imagine what is not explicitly stated, and they are shaped by the affordances and constraints of the medium through which they are conveyed.’
— Marie-Laure Ryan

In the work of Marie-Laure Ryan and Jan-Noël Thon, attention is directed toward the ‘calibration of the tools’ of a new, media-conscious narratology—a theory that understands stories not merely as linguistic structures, but as experiences shaped by the materials, technologies, and cultural frameworks through which they are told. The terms ‘world’ and

‘medium’ become central concepts that must be refined so that they function not as metaphors, but as analytical instruments. To think about media means to think about the ways in which a story can be told; to think about worlds means to describe the imaginary space in which a story unfolds and becomes an experience for its audience. Calibrating these tools requires theory to become sensitive to three fundamental dimensions of the narrative act: the semiotic, the technical, and the cultural. On the semiotic level, media are systems of signs—linguistic, visual, sonic, gestural—that organise modes of expression and delimit the range of possible meanings. The technical dimension determines how media establish a connection between sender and receiver—whether through a book, a screen, or a digital platform—and how this connection shapes the way a story is perceived, remembered, and shared. The cultural dimension encompasses the social institutions and conventions through which media acquire significance, such as the expectations of form, genre, and credibility associated with cinema, television, or social networks.

Taken together, these three dimensions demonstrate that media are not passive channels for transmitting information, but active participants in the construction of the storyworld. The choice of medium is already an act of interpretation: the same story told as a novel, a film, or a video game generates a different cognitive and emotional experience. Media do not merely alter the mode of storytelling; they define what can be told at all. Cinema visualises time and space through movement and montage, while literature constructs interior worlds through language and imagination. Oral storytelling, though technologically ‘unmediated’, is also a medium, because the live act of narration shapes the exchange itself, imparting rhythm, presence, and emotional context. At the same time, the concept of ‘medium’ is polysemous and difficult to define. It may refer to a technology, an art form, a sign system, or a social practice. Like Wittgenstein’s notion of ‘family resemblance’, media have no single centre but a set of overlapping characteristics. For this reason, narratology requires not one universal definition, but a flexible toolkit capable of capturing the specificity of each narrative form. If media determine how stories are told, storyworlds determine what is told. They are imaginary universes that audiences construct in their minds on the basis of cues provided by text or screen. Every narrative projects its own world, with its own laws, spaces, and moral logic. In this sense, the storyworld is not merely a collection of characters and events, but a dynamic structure that links time, space, and action into a sequence of transformations. This dynamism is precisely what distinguishes a narrative world from the static ‘text world’ of description.

Calibrating the tools of a media-conscious narratology also entails recognising the boundaries between the internal and external worlds of the narrative. These boundaries are drawn differently across media. In theatre, the actor’s speech belongs to the internal world, while the chorus comments from outside; in cinema, the camera and montage remain external to the story unless explicitly thematised; in games, the interface forces the player to move constantly between participation and observation. Understanding these transitions is crucial for analysing how media shape the experience of the world. Contemporary culture also produces narratives that exist simultaneously in multiple versions and formats. A single storyworld may unfold across films, books, series, and games, with each medium adding a new layer to the shared universe. This is the logic of transmedia storytelling—the way in which media do not merely transmit stories but collaborate in their construction. Media-conscious narratology must account for this movement: how worlds adapt, expand, and transform as they pass from one form to another. Ultimately, this perspective implies a transformation in the very idea of narrative. Classical narratology approached storytelling as a linguistic structure; the new, media-conscious theory understands it as a process of experiencing and inhabiting fictional worlds. Stories are no longer simply texts, but environments through which audiences move, participate, and generate meaning. To

'calibrate the tools' of this narratology is to think of narrative not only as form, but as a space of interaction between media, technologies, and imagination—a space in which culture continually recreates itself.

What Makes Something 'Fiction'?

'When we engage with fiction, we participate in games of make-believe.'
— Kendall L. Walton

In Storyworlds across Media, a new transmedial perspective is proposed on the question of what makes a work 'fictional' and why fictionality remains such a resilient feature of the human imagination. The issue is not merely semantic, but deeply connected to the ways in which different media construct reality. To call something 'fiction' does not simply mean that it is invented; it means that it belongs to a specific mode of reception in which the audience adopts a particular stance toward the content—a stance that simultaneously acknowledges and suspends reality. This duality can be described through three interrelated components: fictional worlds, games of make-believe, and institutional practices, all of which operate across literature, theatre, cinema, comics, and games. Fictional worlds form the core of artistic narrative. They are imagined universes that diverge from reality while nevertheless relying on it. No fiction begins from nothing; every fictional world uses the real world as a backdrop against which it invents new events, characters, and laws. Here the principle of minimal departure applies: unless explicitly stated otherwise, readers or viewers assume that the fictional world resembles the real one. Difference and continuity intertwine—the fictional world is recognisable yet altered. Without difference, fiction would collapse into the documentary; without continuity, it would become unintelligible. The second component is the game of make-believe, the act through which audiences temporarily enter a 'as if' mode. This idea, developed in the philosophy of art, holds that engaging with artworks is a form of play in which participants know that what they experience is not real, yet respond as though it were. This stance explains why one can fear a monster in a film or sympathise with a character in a novel without losing a sense of reality. Make-believe is not deception, but a cognitive mechanism that allows emotions and situations that would be impossible or dangerous in real life to be explored safely. It provides distance and intensity at once, because fictional experience combines the familiar with the unknown. The third aspect is institutional. Fictionality exists as a cultural practice regulated by social conventions. It depends not only on the author's intention or the audience's response, but on shared signals through which one side announces and the other recognises that a 'game of make-believe' is underway. In literature, this signal is provided by genre markers, paratexts, and publishing contexts; in theatre, by the stage space and the actor's performance; in film, by the aesthetics of montage and the separation of the fictional image from the real trace. Each medium has its own means of indicating that what is presented does not claim literal truth, but truth within the bounds of a fictional world. The combination of these three elements—imagined worlds, an attitude of make-believe, and institutional convention—produces a transmedial model of fictionality. In literature, this model manifests through the linguistic construction of worlds and the figure of a narrator mediating between the real author and the imagined reality. In theatre, actors not only represent but embody fiction, transforming make-believe into live action. In cinema, images are photographic traces of real events, yet montage and dramaturgy reorganise them into a new fictional logic, in which actors and characters exist simultaneously as real bodies and imagined figures. Even in video games, fictionality operates on the same principle:

the player actively participates while accepting the rules of an imagined world and acting within its constraints, fully aware that this is a game. The transferability of this model across media demonstrates that fictionality is not merely a property of texts, but a form of cultural interaction. It makes it possible to recognise the differences between media—how literature uses language, cinema uses the visual and time, theatre uses presence and voice—while highlighting their shared mechanism: the creation of imagined worlds that audiences temporarily treat as real. In this sense, fiction is not an escape, but a way of exploring reality. Make-believe and imaginative assent carry cognitive and emotional value: they allow people to experience, reflect upon, and reshape the boundaries of the possible. Art across media reveals that fictionality is not a feature of a single form, but a universal cultural licence—a permission to build worlds that do not exist in order to better understand the world in which we live.

Playing a 'Real' Game

'The pleasure of fiction depends on the reader's willingness to suspend disbelief.'
— Marie-Laure Ryan

In the final part of Storyworlds across Media (2014), a new and increasingly characteristic phenomenon of digital-age culture is examined: the game of one-upmanship between media and games, in which the boundary between fiction and reality becomes a field of conscious play. This is not a simple competition between art forms, but a particular kind of 'game of make-believe', in which each medium attempts to imitate another, to occupy its role, and to test its techniques. Rather than concealing their artificiality, media increasingly expose it, openly displaying their own languages and devices. The aim is no longer the illusion of reality, but the pleasure of revealing the mechanisms through which any reality is produced. To 'play a real game' in contemporary culture no longer means merely to participate in an interactive system, but to recognise the act of playing itself as part of the narrative. What emerges is a mirror-play between media, in which one form begins to imitate or parody another: a film that behaves like a video game, a theatre performance that adopts cinematic logic, or social media platforms that reproduce the grammar of staged performance. In this contest the spectator is no longer an external observer, but a participant who knows that a game is being played and who derives meaning precisely from this awareness. Historically, the arts have competed in terms of persuasive representation: painting through the illusion of depth, literature through access to inner life, cinema through the realism of movement. Today this rivalry takes on a different form. The question is no longer which medium best conceals its artificiality, but which displays it most playfully. The interaction between media becomes a form of cultural self-awareness, in which realism gives way to performativity, and fiction gives way to experimentation with its own limits. Each medium steps into the role of another in order to explore what else it might become once it stops taking itself entirely seriously. This 'one-upmanship' is not mere quotation or parody, but a dynamic process of reformatting. Media appropriate foreign grammars—visual, sonic, or textual—and apply them to their own structures. Film can resemble a game, the novel can sound like a screenplay, theatre can behave like a television show. What is revealed is a deeper principle: media are no longer closed systems, but players on a shared stage, each demonstrating its own version of reality. Every new work becomes not only a story, but a commentary on the ways stories are told. This logic of play does not remain confined to the arts. It spills over into everyday life, where social media and public roles generate their own scripts and characters. People begin to perform themselves, to stage experiences, and to follow the rules of a cultural

game centred on attention and recognition. In this sense, reality appears as an extension of media make-believe—not because belief in truth has disappeared, but because truth has learned to present itself as a role. To participate in such a 'game of reality' means to understand media codes and to be able to switch between them. Cultural competence becomes an ability to shift positions: between spectator and participant, between observation and performance. Media invite audiences to 'enter the game', to press the symbolic Start button and become part of the action. There are no final winners in this game, because each new technology or platform changes the rules and redefines the experience. The interplay between media and reality shows that the artistic is no longer measured by how 'real' something appears, but by how consciously it manipulates its own unreality. The true game is not an imitation of life, but a way of making sense of life through artificially constructed forms. When one medium pretends to be another, it does not lose its identity; it expands it. In this way, the culture of hypermediality does not erase the boundaries between the arts, but turns them into a space of constant dialogue, in which the real and the imaginary continually exchange places. Ultimately, 'playing a real game' becomes a metaphor for contemporary experience itself: a life built upon layers of media simulation, in which one knows one is participating and yet remains emotionally engaged. It demonstrates that art no longer needs to conceal its artificiality in order to be convincing. On the contrary, the more clearly it reveals its own tricks, the more vital its relationship with reality becomes. The game is not an escape from truth, but a way of understanding what it means to create truth again and again.

1.3. Pseudo-Events, Pseudo-Worlds

The Theory of Possible Worlds

'Fiction creates a world that departs from the actual world, yet remains connected to it through shared principles of intelligibility.'
— Marie-Laure Ryan

In the book[24] The Theory of Possible Worlds and Contemporary Narratology (2019), Alastair Bell and Marie-Laure Ryan propose a systematic approach to possible worlds theory by taking it beyond the limitations imposed by traditional philosophy and structuralism on language. Their ambition is to overcome what was once described as the 'prison of language'—the idea that thought and meaning are entirely subordinated to linguistic structure and cannot be conceived outside it. Possible worlds theory escapes this trap by offering a model in which language is not a boundary but an instrument for describing multiple realities. Narrative is thus understood not as a product of a closed linguistic system, but as a dynamic construction of worlds that can exist, intersect and transform according to the logic of imagination. The central idea of the theory is that every statement, whether philosophical, scientific or literary, can be understood within the framework of a world—actual or possible. Truth, from this perspective, is not absolute but contextual: a proposition may be true in one world and false in another. This shift frees semantics from its dependence on empirical reality and situates it within a network of possibilities in which language is no longer merely a system of signs, but a tool for modelling

[24] Bell, A. and Ryan, M.-L. (2019). Possible Worlds Theory and Contemporary Narratology. University Of Nebraska Press.

conceivable scenarios. Within each such scenario, words, meanings and relations follow the internal logic of the given world rather than a universal norm. This reconceptualisation has decisive consequences for literary theory. First, it rehabilitates fiction as a legitimate object of truth—not because fiction is 'true' in our world, but because it is true in its own. Second, it allows criticism to rethink reference without falling back into naïve realism. Possible worlds provide a way of understanding how literature speaks about reality without duplicating it. The literary work becomes a laboratory of modalities—a space in which the limits of the possible, the moral, the necessary and the impossible are explored. From this follows a new understanding of the reader's role.

If every text projects its own 'textual actual world', then the act of reading becomes a process of re-centring—a temporary relocation of consciousness into that world, which is experienced as actual within the logic of pretence. The reader does not merely observe fiction from the outside, but inhabits it from within, recalibrating their own system of beliefs and meanings. This explains why fictional events can provoke real emotions: they occur in a world in which the reader temporarily lives. Possible worlds theory also introduces the key principle of minimal departure—the idea that readers carry over as much of their real-world knowledge as possible, altering only what the text explicitly requires. In this way the fictional world always remains close to the real one, yet never fully coincides with it. This balanced distance constitutes the foundation of literary imagination: it explores new possibilities without severing ties to the familiar. The theory also rethinks narrative structure itself. Every story can be viewed as a system of interconnected worlds—a primary world that establishes the facts of the narrative, and multiple sub-worlds generated by the thoughts, desires and fears of characters. Action becomes movement between these worlds, a collision of competing possibilities and values. Plot development and resolution are not merely changes in events, but reconfigurations of relations between worlds: which possibilities are realised, which remain closed. On a broader level, possible worlds theory offers a model for understanding genres as different profiles of accessibility between worlds. Realist narrative maintains proximity to our world, the fantastic partially disrupts it, and alternate histories overturn it entirely. This typology is not simply a classification of texts, but an instrument for describing how culture imagines reality and its limits. By moving analysis beyond linguistic constraints, possible worlds theory transforms narratology into a modal science—not of words, but of possible modes of existence that narrative can model. It shows that language is not a prison, but an open system capable of projecting multiple realities, each with its own logic, morality and truth. In this sense, literature does not merely reflect the world, but multiplies it: it creates a horizon of possibility in which thought, imagination and language are released from the obligation to coincide with actuality and begin to generate worlds of their own.

How Does Narrative Become a Storyworld?

'Storyworlds are mental models of the situations and events described in a narrative—models that readers construct on the basis of textual cues.'
— Marie-Laure Ryan

In Possible Worlds Theory, Bell and Ryan develop the idea that narrative does not merely communicate events but constructs entire universes—storyworlds—that function as thinkable, inhabitable and analysable worlds. This concept shifts possible worlds theory from philosophical modality into narratology and shows how fictional and non-fictional discourse can be understood

within a unified framework of world-building. Narrative, from this perspective, is no longer simply a structure of words or a sequence of actions, but a model of existence—a way in which language, imagination and culture generate alternative spaces of meaning. A storyworld is a cognitive and artistic construct with its own ontology, agents, temporality and laws. It is not merely a stage on which events occur, but an organised system of relations that produces a sense of coherence and reality. The text may be only a blueprint, yet in the reader's mind a complete world is assembled—one with geography, social order, causality and moral coordinates. This capacity to construct 'more than is said' is the key to narrative power: stories engage because they invite imagination to supplement, expand and inhabit the world that language outlines. Possible worlds provide the conceptual tools for thinking this 'worldness'. They introduce the idea that the truth and meaning of any statement depend on the world in which it is evaluated. Every narrative thus establishes its own actual world, distinct from ours but comparable to it along certain parameters. To the extent that this world shares laws, values or logics with reality, the reader can orient themselves and draw inferences. When differences become more pronounced—as in fantasy or alternate history—it is precisely the violation of realist rules that sustains curiosity and meaning. Storyworlds therefore arrange themselves along a spectrum, from those closely aligned with the actual world to those that are fully autonomous or even impossible. The worlds constructed by narrative are not necessarily fictional. Every documentary or autobiographical text also builds a world-image that may diverge from lived reality. In non-fictional narratives the world is a reconstruction of the real; in fictional ones it is a creative act of invention. The difference lies in the status of reference: the real world serves as a source in the former and as a model in the latter. In all cases, the reader constructs a mental model rather than merely registering facts or descriptions. Bell and Ryan emphasise that worldness does not depend on the scale of the narrative, but on its coherence and internal logic. Even a minimal text can contain the germ of a universe if it provides sufficient information about relations between events, spaces and actions. Conversely, large-scale narratives unfolding across multiple works and media create expanded storyworlds in which individual stories function as episodes within a broader cosmology. This marks the transition from possible worlds to story universes—cultural constructs that exist beyond any single text and can be shared, continued and rewritten by different authors and audiences.

The concept of the storyworld also raises questions of identity and continuity. When do two narratives belong to the same world? The answer lies in the degree of overlap between characters, spaces, temporal order and moral code. When these elements are preserved, new stories operate as extensions; when they are fundamentally altered, parallel worlds or alternative versions emerge. This logic of multiplication also explains phenomena such as transmedia storytelling, in which a single world is retold and reconfigured across different media—literature, film, games, comics—each adding its own layer to the shared imaginary space. Worlds also differ in their degree of completeness. Philosophical possible worlds are ideally complete: for every proposition, it is either true or false. Narrative worlds rarely achieve such completeness. They contain gaps, undisclosed facts and indeterminate elements. These gaps are not weaknesses but sources of strength, because they compel imagination to collaborate. The reader fills in the omissions by constructing a personal version of the world and thus participates in the act of creation itself. In this sense narrativity is not merely the transmission of events but a dialogue between text and consciousness, between fiction and cognition. Ultimately, the shift from possible worlds to story universes transforms the nature of narratology itself. It turns narrative analysis into an investigation of world-building—of how language creates inhabitable spaces, how texts organise experience as a world, and how audiences move between real and imagined universes. Within this framework literature and media cease to function as mirrors of reality and

become its co-authors—systems that do not merely describe the world, but produce it, expand it and multiply it within the boundless field of the possible.

Hyperlinks as Ontological Switches

'In hypertext, reading becomes a navigation through a network of possible worlds.'
— Marie-Laure Ryan

Alistair Bell and Marie-Laure Ryan examine how possible worlds theory can explain the transformed nature of narrative in the digital age. They show that hypertextual and multimedia narratives do not merely extend traditional concepts of story and plot, but transform the very ontology of fiction itself. In digital prose, hyperlinks function as ontological switches that reorder the boundary between the fictional and the real. This shift alters the understanding of narrative experience: the reader no longer moves only within a single textual world, but participates in a continuous passage between multiple worlds—fictional, documentary and networked. Digital prose, as analysed by Bell and Ryan, cannot be conceived outside its technological environment. It is created for the screen and through the screen, incorporating movement, sound, image and interactivity. Here the act of reading becomes navigation, and the hyperlink becomes a gesture that opens a new direction of meaning. Possible worlds are materialised not solely through language, but through the network architecture of the internet itself, which enables the simultaneous existence of different realities. Each click opens a door into another modal domain: from a fictional text to a documentary website, from an imagined scene to a real archive. In this context the hyperlink is not merely a technical element, but a medial symbol of modality—a sign that the boundary between worlds is in motion. Bell and Ryan identify three primary effects of these links that transform the reader's position in relation to the narrative world. The first is the blinking effect: a rapid and repeated shifting between the fictional and the actual world. The reader is simultaneously aware of leaving the text and continues to conceive the abandoned world as real. This ambiguity produces a new sense of presence—being both inside and outside the narrative at once. The second effect is updating, whereby a link leads to a real source capable of altering the interpretation of the fiction. The real document becomes part of the narrative's internal logic and refreshes its claim to truth. The third effect is fusion—the moment in which the link merges the two worlds so that the boundary between them dissolves. Fiction turns into document, and document into narrative. These effects are not stylistic devices but deep ontological operations. They require the reader to perform constant 're-centring', a term Ryan uses to describe the imaginative relocation of consciousness from the actual world to the world of the text.

In the digital context this relocation becomes bidirectional and repeatable: each link triggers a momentary exit and return, through which the reader not only inhabits but actively reconstructs the world of the work. Reading becomes continuous ontological labour—a synchronisation of the real and the virtual. In this way possible worlds theory acquires a new function. It no longer merely describes the logical relations between fictional and actual worlds, but models the very process of movement between them. Digital prose, through its interactivity and multimodality, demonstrates that fiction is not a stable object but a dynamic configuration of relations. Each hyperlink is an act of transfer—a kind of portal that connects worlds and recalibrates their ontological coordinates. This new form of narrative also demands a new type of reader. The reader is no longer a passive observer but an active participant who selects, combines and interprets. Digital culture turns the reader into a navigator of worlds, a co-author of meaning.

This leads to a rethinking of authorship itself: the author no longer controls a linear structure but designs a system of possibilities that allows multiple trajectories. In this way hypertext becomes a model of the world itself—not hierarchical and stable, but networked, relational and open. Bell and Ryan emphasise that hyperlinks do not simply destroy the illusion of reality, but complicate it. They enable distance and immersion, irony and empathy at the same time. When a link leads to a real document, the effect is not distraction but intensified authenticity. Digital narrative does not deny the real; it weaves it into its own structure, turning the network into a space of ethical and emotional engagement. Ultimately, possible worlds theory applied to digital prose reveals that hyperlinks are not merely tools of navigation, but metaphysical mechanisms of connection. They transform the reader into a mediator between fiction and reality, and the text into a dynamic network of worlds. Digital narrative does not abolish traditional narrativity; it reconfigures it—from a closed system into an open field of possibilities, where meaning emerges in the very act of moving from one world to another.

Rethinking Narrative through the Digital

'Digital environments are procedural; they represent their content through algorithms. They are not just stories we read, but worlds we navigate.'
— Janet H. Murray

In the book[25] Playing at Narratology: Digital Media as Narrative Theory (2019), David Punday reverses the direction of inquiry: not how theory explains digital media, but how digital media already produce theory by turning abstract narratological concepts into working code and practical algorithms. The central claim is that when code encounters story, narratology is reformatted. Storytelling ceases to function only as an analytical model and becomes an operating system in which interfaces, rules and algorithms perform the work of narrative structures. Instead of asking whether digital forms are 'true' narratives, the analysis reveals how they bring to the surface the latent assumptions of theory itself. What is an event when it occurs at runtime? What is a character when agency is distributed between player input, animation and procedures? What is setting when space is navigable and procedural rather than merely descriptive; what is a world when it is configured through databases, rules and simulation? What is narration when direction is embedded in affordances, feedback loops and state trees? The digital environment shifts the status of narrative from fixed text to a system of possibilities. The interface is no longer a neutral window but a rhetoric: the cursor, camera movement, menus, metrics and hubs guide attention and tempo in the same way that discourse once guided point of view and montage. Rules act as an implicit narrator: they define horizons of possibility, sanction choices and 'speak' through their consequences. Algorithmic temporality replaces the linear time of plot with cyclical regimes of trial and error, checkpoints, repetition and emergent configurations; tension is encoded in systems of risk and reward, while the narrative arc is translated into rhythms of difficulty and mastery. In this regime, the event is an executable action arising from the encounter between user input, system state and probabilistic mechanics; fabula becomes a trajectory through a space of states, and discourse becomes the interface economy of showing and withholding.

[25] Punday, D. (2019). Playing at narratology : digital media as narrative theory. Columbus: The Ohio State University Press.

The character turns into a composite: a visual layer, behavioural scripts, statistical parameters and systemic positioning; subjectivity is constructed through camera, sound, haptic feedback and informational access. Setting becomes an organisational logic: it maps access, filters tasks, packages narrative possibilities and assigns semantic weight to movement. The world is an ontological specification in which rules determine what counts as causal, possible, permitted and meaningful; transmedia extensions function as tests of identity and continuity under new constraints. From this follow methodological adjustments for narratology itself. Rather than pursuing universal schemes, it examines strategies that travel across media: prompting, mapping, simulating, executing. Instead of opposing 'story' and 'description', it treats description as the management of attention and access; instead of insisting on a single narrator, it analyses distributed modes of authorship in which system design, level architecture and interface composition function as a narrative voice. Instead of understanding immersion solely as an effect of illusion, it reconceives it as a competence of use: learning the grammar of interaction in which meaning emerges from practices rather than from representations alone. Digital forms historicise theory itself by showing that so-called classical concepts always contained an executable potential that is now literalised in code. This displaces sterile debates between 'old' and 'new': the value of the digital lies not in abolishing tradition but in making it visible and operational. Ultimately, the book argues that digital narrative is narratology by other means: a laboratory in which abstract categories become engineering problems and hypotheses become systems people act within. When code meets story, theory does not merely adapt to a new medium; it gains a mirror that forces it to specify itself, to become sensitive to materials, rules and interfaces, and to think of storytelling as a practice of design, play and interpretation within a single operational environment.

Positioning the Reader in Digital Narrative

'In cybertext, the user's traversal is a function of physical construction; the reader is not only a reader, but also a player, a figure who moves the pieces.'
— Espen J. Aarseth

In Playing at Narratology, David Punday rethinks the classical categories of storytelling in order to explain how digital media transform the relations between author, text and reader. He begins from the premise that narrative has always involved an act of mediation—someone tells someone else that something has happened. In the digital environment, however, this structure is destabilised and rearranged, because storytelling no longer takes place solely through language, but through actions, choices and interfaces. Punday shows that digital narrative reveals a new form of mediation—not only between voices, but between systems and participants. This shift requires a theoretical move beyond the narrator, towards models that conceptualise the reader as simultaneously interpreter and operator. Digital narration introduces a different mode of participation. It is not merely a 'told world', but a system of rules that the reader must learn in order to move within it. Punday notes that every digital text establishes its own grammar of action—what a click means, what an icon unlocks, what enables navigation. Positioning the reader thus shifts from interpretation to execution. Reading becomes interaction, and narration becomes a programmed procedure in which meaning emerges from the joint operation of user and code. This transformation turns rules into narrative elements: they are no longer a hidden frame, but a source of meaning, tension and narrative rhythm. In this context, Punday introduces the concept of 'intrigue'—a structural plan through which the system guides the participant's

actions while the narrative unfolds. Intrigue is not simply a sequence of events, but an underlying mechanism that organises the experience of reading. It establishes possibilities, constraints and feedback, placing the reader in the role of an explorer who must decode the internal logic of the work. In this way, the digital text always operates on two parallel levels: the narrative level, where someone 'tells', and the level of intrigue, where someone 'designs' how one must act in order to access the telling. This double positioning turns the reader into both listener and participant, discovering the plot through their own moves. The interactivity of digital forms also reveals a new type of 'narrative agency'.

Traditional narrative conveys information through voice, point of view and style, whereas digital narrative delegates this function to system architecture. Code, interface and rules become equivalents of the narrator. They do not 'speak', but 'govern', by defining routes, signalling possibilities and setting boundaries. Punday describes this as a rhetoric of use: every interaction is simultaneously a meaningful act and a gesture of interpretation. The theory of the implied author is thus rewritten—not as a hidden textual norm, but as a design that channels reader behaviour. The role of the audience changes accordingly. Classical narratology distinguishes between authorial and narrative audiences—the former recognising artistic codes, the latter accepting the fiction as real. In the digital environment, a third position emerges: that of the participant, who must understand not only meanings, but also system mechanics. This participant reads rules, tests them through practice, and learns what can and cannot be done. From this arises a new form of interpretative competence—not literary, but procedural. The reader no longer seeks hidden meaning, but explores the boundaries of possibility. Digital narrative does not abolish storytelling; it extends it into a new dimension. It combines linguistic and algorithmic mediation, making interaction itself part of narrative logic. Every link, every choice and every action becomes an act of storytelling. The story thus unfolds not only in the text, but in the very process of use. The reader is no longer merely the addressee of a message, but a co-author who constructs the plot while participating in it. The result is a new form of narratology—one that is both medial and material. It analyses not only what is said, but how the system enables it to be experienced. Storytelling is no longer a single act, but a constellation of interactions between text, interface and user. This requires a theory that understands narrative not as a product, but as a process; not as fixed meaning, but as a dynamic of use. In the digital age, the narrator fragments into multiple voices, codes and protocols. Intrigue and rules of action become new instruments of narration, and the reader becomes a figure who simultaneously listens and plays, reads and creates. Beyond the narrator begins the space where story and system meet—and where narratology must learn to think not only how stories are told, but how one must act in order for them to be told at all.

Digital Artefacts and the New Narratology

'The procedural and participatory nature of digital environments makes the computer not just a delivery system, but a co-author of the narrative experience.'
— Janet H. Murray

David Punday examines how digital artefacts do not simply change the way stories are told, but fundamentally rethink the structure of narrative theory itself. His central claim is that when the medium changes, the logic of narration changes with it. The machine is no longer a neutral conduit of meaning, but an active participant that shapes thinking, perception and action. Digital technologies thus do not merely offer new expressive forms; they challenge the inherited

assumptions of narratology itself—what it means to have a narrator, a plot, time and an audience, when all of these categories are embedded in software and interface design. Punday shows that classical narratology developed in an era when literature appeared to function as a universal platform. The book, the page and the order of reading were so stable that they were perceived as transparent. The digital transition disrupts this transparency by making materiality visible. Every interface—mouse, touchscreen, sensor, VR headset—rewrites not only interaction, but the very idea of action, time and space. This shift transforms the medium from background into event, from tool into co-author. Digital artefacts bring to the surface mechanisms that were previously hidden: the rules that guide perception and the protocols that define what can be done within a given narrative system. Within this framework, Punday identifies two new figures: the narrator and the 'intrigator'. The narrator organises voice and temporal flow, while the intrigator designs the actions through which the reader or player advances the story. This dual structure reveals that narrative is no longer purely linguistic, but procedural. Meaning emerges from interaction between user and system, between human intention and programmatic logic. The reader does not merely interpret, but performs. Every click, pause or error becomes part of pacing and dramaturgy. Narrative time is supplemented by 'interface time'—the rhythm of clicks, delays and loading sequences. Space is likewise doubled: there is the world of the story and the orienting space through which the participant navigates. These dimensions are not decorative additions, but structural components of narrative experience.

Punday emphasises that narratology has always been close to the logic of play. Its systemic impulse, its pursuit of models and classifications, already framed storytelling as a combination of rules and variations. Digital media literalise this tendency. Theory, once applied to fictional structures, becomes visible in practice: stories unfold through interfaces, buttons, scripts and algorithms. The artefact itself demonstrates what plot, character or voice are by translating them into mechanics. This engagement with the machine is not a formal experiment alone, but a way of probing the limits of narration. The central conclusion is that action becomes a new mode of understanding. To grasp the story, the participant must learn to operate within the system, and this learning process is itself meaningful. Digital narrative cannot be 'read' without being played. This produces a new kind of audience—not a passive recipient, but an active agent who understands through practice. Punday notes that the rules governing play are rhetorical gestures no less than the sentences that tell a story. Narrative theory must therefore account for these material elements, because they determine how the reader is positioned within the narrative. Digital artefacts, in Punday's view, do not undermine narratology; they compel its evolution. They are not evidence of the end of storytelling, but laboratories for its rethinking. Where traditional literary analysis sought meaning within the text, digital culture tests meaning through the interface. The interaction between human and machine becomes the new equivalent of the author–reader relation. Theory can no longer limit itself to interpretation; it must address design, code, environment and action as components of narrative structure. In conclusion, Playing at Narratology: Digital Media as Narrative Theory demonstrates that the stories of our time are built not only from words, but from algorithms. When machines participate in the production of meaning, they cease to be mere tools and become co-authors of new ways of thinking. Punday calls for a more flexible theory, one that recognises artefacts as thought experiments and accepts play as a mode of knowledge. In the digital world, narrative no longer unfolds on the page, but on a screen that thinks back—and in doing so proves that storytelling was never purely a human affair, but a collaborative action between story and machine.

Political Scenarios of Tomorrow

'For most people, political language is the political reality.'
— Murray Edelman

In his article[26] 'Screenwriting and Political Narrative' (2018), John Frame examines how script-based thinking is reshaping the way political stories and public meanings are produced. The text proposes a new perspective on the relationship between narrative and power, showing that in the contemporary media environment political events increasingly resemble scripts—carefully structured, emotionally charged and oriented towards a predefined effect. The authors explore how political narratives turn into new forms of 'pseudo-events' that do not merely reflect reality but actively produce it through the dramaturgy of participation. These constructed worlds bind viewers and citizens to an experience, offering not information but involvement in a predesigned plot. From this emerges the central idea that future politics will be written as a script—with clear acts, conflicts and protagonists. The argument begins from the recognition that stories possess greater persuasive power than arguments. Narratives activate not only reason but also the senses, imagination and emotions. They engage audiences more deeply because they generate identification rather than rational assent. Political narratives exploit precisely this psychological and neurological force of storytelling: they create a sense of shared drama in which every citizen can find a role. Political messaging ceases to function as a logical proposition and becomes a narrative line—with heroes, antagonists and climactic moments. This transformation alters the very nature of public communication: from a contest of ideas it becomes a struggle between stories. The key mechanism of this shift is the script. In script-based thinking every story follows a dramatic structure—inciting incident, obstacles, turning points and resolution. This formula, long mastered by cinema and advertising, is now applied to politics. Campaigns, causes and ideological movements are designed as scripts that direct attention, shape emotional engagement and generate a predictable trajectory of development. The political party becomes a guide, the citizen a protagonist, and the 'world' of political action a curated universe of images, sounds and actions in which truth is secondary to experience. This logic is especially visible in the digital environment. The internet provides a continuous stream of behavioural data that allows political 'screenwriters' to calibrate their plots in response to audience reactions. Speeches, videos and posts are tested, rewritten and edited in real time until they achieve maximum impact. The pseudo-event, once described as a media illusion, now becomes a living world—interactive, personalised and continuous.

Politics is no longer a sequence of facts but a constant flow of simulated events that feel real because they generate engagement and a sense of belonging. The central concept in this theory is immersion. The deeper viewers or citizens are immersed in a narrative, the harder it becomes to distinguish fiction from reality. For this reason the political message of the future will not be expressed through slogans, but through the construction of entire worlds—interactive campaigns, virtual communities and local 'hubs' where participants do not merely listen but act. The goal is not to inform but to involve, to create an experience in which people perform their assigned roles. This shift turns the audience into co-authors and blurs the boundaries between politics, marketing and art. Script-based structures also raise ethical concerns. The more refined the craft of persuasion becomes, the subtler the potential for manipulation. Political scripts can generate solidarity, but they can also manufacture illusions by replacing genuine public dialogue with a dramaturgical simulation of participation. This creates the need for a new form of literacy—the

[26] Midnight Oil Studios. (2018). Screenwriting & Political Narrative by John Fraim. [online] Available at: https://midnightoilstudios.org/2018/10/14/screenwriting-and-political-narrative/ [Accessed 12 Oct. 2025].

ability to recognise narrative mechanisms and rhetorical techniques through which political 'realities' are produced. Democracy requires not only storytellers, but critical readers of those stories. Script-based thinking, however, is not solely an instrument of propaganda; it can also become a tool for democratic imagination. If political stories are written honestly and with empathy, they can offer society a shared stage where different perspectives find a place within a broader narrative. Politics then becomes an art of meaning rather than merely a struggle for power. Screenwriting in political narrative outlines a future in which political messages will be constructed using the methods of cinema and advertising, but also with the ethical potential of responsible storytelling. The world of pseudo-events and constructed realities will not disappear; on the contrary, it will continue to expand. The question is whether these worlds will serve manipulation or understanding. The politics of tomorrow will be a politics of authors—those who know how to write not just speeches, but worlds in which citizens can recognise themselves as protagonists of a shared story.

From Scripts to Story Systems

'We need stories in the same way we need dreams.'
— David Foster Wallace

In the book[27] StoryNomics (2018), Robert McKee and Thomas Gerace describe how the logic of screenwriting migrates from the film industry into business, and how this shift gradually transforms the very understanding of communication, persuasion and power. They advance the claim that storytelling is not merely a marketing tool but a fundamental grammar of human perception, through which any message can be transformed into experience. From this emerges the model of storytelling as a system—not a single story, but an integrated world in which people recognise themselves as protagonists. This transformation, originating in the corporate sphere, signals a future politics in which narrative determines action rather than the reverse. The central idea of StoryNomics is that in an age of informational abundance, attention is the scarcest resource. People do not respond to data, claims or advertisements, but to stories that allow them to make sense of their own experiences. McKee and Gerace articulate seven core steps of effective storytelling: a character, a problem, a mentor, a plan, a call to action, the avoidance of failure and success. Derived from dramatic structure, this sequence becomes a universal model for building trust. It functions as an algorithm of human attention, arranging information into emotional rhythms and providing a clear direction for action. At the heart of the model lies the idea of 'the customer as hero'. This reconfigures the traditional approach in which the brand positions itself as the central subject of the story. Instead of broadcasting its achievements and values, the narrative turns toward the individual and their search for resolution, security or meaning. The brand assumes the role of mentor—a figure combining empathy and competence, offering a plan and accompanying the hero toward success. This role is not one of domination but of guidance: the company does not rescue, it supports. In this way a deeper form of communication emerges, based on identification rather than persuasion. When applied consistently, the brand ceases to be a source of noisy advertising and becomes an architect of an environment that the user inhabits. Communication shifts from isolated messages to systems of

[27] Mckee, R. and Gerace, T. (2018). Storynomics. Twelve.

experience—journeys, rituals and interactive spaces that construct a world with its own rules and meanings. Narrative becomes an ecosystem rather than a campaign.
This marks a transition from a monological to a dialogical model of communication: people are no longer an audience, but participants. This shift also has a profound cognitive logic. People do not seek information, but context. Story is a form of contextualisation that transforms facts into meaning. This is why it is so powerful—it does not describe the world, it models it. In a contemporary culture where attention is contested by countless messages, the most effective actors are not those who shout the loudest, but those who succeed in enveloping participants in an experience, turning them into co-authors. Storytelling thus becomes a form of soft power that guides choice without appearing coercive. On a theoretical level, McKee and Gerace conceptualise storytelling as an energetic system in which tension between desire and obstacle sustains interest. When a company or political actor manages this tension with precise structure and authentic emotion, trust emerges. But the greater this power, the greater the risks. Systematised narratives can be used for manipulation: by simplifying reality, by inventing false antagonists and by maintaining constant emotional dependency. In such cases, narrative ceases to be a tool of understanding and becomes a mechanism of control. This logic explains why business scripts increasingly migrate into politics. The voter is constructed as a hero with a problem—social insecurity, economic inequality, fear of the future—who encounters a mentor in the form of a party or leader. The political programme becomes a 'plan', and the campaign a sequence of 'scenes' leading toward a promised resolution. Politics thus begins to function like a serial narrative with recurring motifs and recognisable roles that sustain a sense of meaning and direction. The ethical dilemma posed by StoryNomics is whether these story systems will serve human development or reinforce market and political dependency. McKee and Gerace insist that a good story is one that creates value beyond the sale—one that helps people see themselves as active participants in a larger process. The true power of storytelling lies not in manipulation, but in its capacity to unite, inspire and encourage conscious action. In conclusion, StoryNomics formulates a shift from stories to story systems. In a world saturated with information, structured narrative becomes a new form of order. The model of 'the customer as hero' demonstrates that effective communication is grounded not in self-promotion, but in empathy. This logic is already transforming business and is poised to reshape politics, turning public life into a network of interconnected narratives in which people do not merely consume meaning, but actively produce it.

The Invisible Architecture of Pseudo-Events

'A pseudo-event is not spontaneous, but comes about because someone has planned, planted, or incited it.'
— Daniel J. Boorstin

In the 2012 edition[28] of The Image: A Guide to Pseudo-Events in America, Daniel Joseph Boorstin, in dialogue with later media theorists such as Douglas Rushkoff, outlines a theory of the hidden structure of contemporary publicity, in which social and political reality is produced not through facts but through carefully staged performances. At the centre of this structure stands the pseudo-event: a planned, orchestrated and endlessly reproduced occurrence whose primary

[28] Daniel Joseph Boorstin and Rushkoff, D. (2012). The image : a guide to pseudo-events in America. New York (N.Y.): Vintage Books, Cop.

purpose is not to happen, but to be reported. Pseudo-events form the invisible architecture of the image society. They do not merely inform; they predefine the boundaries of what can be thought and determine the environment in which meaning is already fixed before it is even articulated. This concept marks a transition from classical propaganda to a subtler form of power exercised through context. Where authority once attempted to control thought through words, it now shapes the environment in which words acquire meaning. The pseudo-event is a media construct that does not rely on coercion, but operates through attractiveness, repetition and ritual. It organises attention, directs emotion and erases the distinction between reality and its representation. In this model, truth is no longer something that must be argued, but something that must be staged in the correct setting.

The mechanism of the pseudo-event rests on three elements: script, image and repetition. The script provides a causal framework—a beginning, a conflict and a resolution; the image delivers the visual impact that substitutes for substance; repetition stabilises the sense of reality. Together, these layers form a system in which the boundary between action and representation dissolves. The more an event is replayed, shared and commented upon, the more real it appears. Reality is no longer validated by facts, but by the number of witnesses. The psychological power of this model derives from the human dependence on narrative and from the economy of attention. People do not experience the world as isolated facts, but as stories that link events into causal sequences. Pseudo-events offer ready-made stories—short, clearly structured and emotionally charged. They are easily consumed because they satisfy the demand for meaning with minimal cognitive effort. In an age of informational overload, this ease becomes a decisive advantage. The staged appears more credible precisely because it is more accessible.

The ethical danger lies in the invisibility of the stage. When the architecture of presentation remains unseen, audiences lose the ability to distinguish the produced from the spontaneous. The pseudo-event does not present itself as fiction, but as reality itself. It eliminates uncertainty and contingency—the very elements that make life real—and replaces them with an ordered spectacle of predictable reactions. Society gradually becomes a theatre in which every actor believes they are merely a spectator. The loss is not only cognitive, but existential: individuals cease to participate in their own history and begin to inhabit someone else's script. Political and media institutions refine this technique by transforming communication into the management of attention. Power is no longer grounded primarily in ideology, but in the capacity to maintain a constant stream of spectacles that replace genuine debate with dramaturgical conflict. In such an environment, every side generates its own pseudo-events—visual and emotional constructions that confirm a preselected narrative. The result is a fragmented society in which multiple 'realities' coexist, each sustained by its own spectacle.

The way out of this closed circuit is not the rejection of media or representation itself, but the recognition of the architecture that sustains them. When citizens learn to identify how pseudo-events are produced, they recover a measure of lost autonomy. What is required is a new form of critical literacy directed not at content, but at form: at how an event is constructed, what its scenography conceals, and which emotions it seeks to activate. The invisible architecture of pseudo-events is, in fact, an architecture of meaning. It determines what can be thought and felt by replacing reality with a continuous flow of carefully staged visibility. To understand this architecture is to cross the boundary between spectator and participant, between image and action. The act of recognising the staged is itself the first gesture of freedom in a world where truth is no longer spoken, but placed on stage.

From Narrative to Script

'We become what we behold. We shape our tools and thereafter our tools shape us.'
— John Culkin

At the end of the first chapter, the analysis returns to Media Narrative by Prof. Snezhana Popova in order to formulate a conclusion and a logical transition towards the theme of the media script. This transition is not a simple theoretical shift, but a key symptom of the contemporary communicational condition. Popova demonstrates that the digital environment has disrupted the classical form of narrative, replacing it with a new logic: the logic of the script, in which action becomes more important than meaning, and reaction displaces understanding. In the world of online media, people no longer tell stories in order to be heard, but in order to remain connected. Words no longer mediate between consciousnesses; they function as markers of presence. More communication no longer produces more understanding, because communication has ceased to be dialogue and has become a continuous stream of actions. The digital environment places the individual in a state of permanent participation. Each user is simultaneously author and audience, spectator and actor, director and character within a personal media world. The internet collapses all communicational functions into a single, uninterrupted interaction without clear beginning or end. Texts are produced, replicated and erased in motion, while authorship dissolves into collective production. As a result, language loses its stability. Words cease to function as carriers of meaning and become instruments of strategy. Communication is no longer an attempt at understanding, but a competition for attention. Every post, share or comment is a move in a game governed not by moral or logical rules, but by tactical ones. In this new communicational ecosystem, the boundary between content and form disappears. The message is no longer perceived through what it says, but through how it operates. Narrative has lost its autonomy and has transformed into script: not merely a sequence of events, but a programme for action that anticipates the behaviour of participants. Digital speech becomes repetitive, templated and predictable. It operates through ready-made patterns that can be reproduced endlessly without loss of force. This is why communication increasingly feels like permanent simulation: everyone speaks, no one listens; everyone responds without having heard the question.

The script is a structural form that replaces human interaction with an automatic model of participation. It does not seek mutual understanding, but measurable outcome. Narrative was an act of semantic creation, whereas the script is an act of functional execution. In the digital environment this means that truth is no longer measured by correspondence to reality, but by effect. A successful story is not the one that is true, but the one that generates more reactions. Communication submits to a new economy of attention in which the most valuable element is not argument, but emotional impact. In this process, media cease to function as intermediaries and become players within the game. They do not merely report; they act. They produce contexts, create rituals and organise scenes in which the viewer is simultaneously audience and instrument. Audiences that once listened now perform. Every online action, from liking a post to signing a petition, becomes part of a larger strategic construction that sustains the circulation of the digital flow. Reality is experienced as a continuous spectacle in which individuals affirm themselves through visibility and reaction. This reconfiguration of communication produces a new type of identity: temporary, flexible and dependent on the algorithms that render it visible. The narrative that once expressed inner coherence fragments into short, discontinuous scripts. Each has a beginning and a response, but rarely a semantic closure. Communication becomes a collection of micro-narratives that sustain the illusion of community, while beneath it lies a growing sense of isolation. The game of continuous interaction replaces the need for truth with the need for movement.

The transition from narrative to script is not only technological, but anthropological. It marks the end of the human being as storyteller and the beginning of the human being as player. Narrative requires time, listening and patience; the script demands speed, reaction and execution. The script is the product of a culture that values effect over content and visibility over understanding. It is a form of social organisation in which communication does not aim at shared meaning, but at permanent activation. The conclusion of the first chapter therefore points to the fact that the digital age has transformed narrative into script and communication into action without memory. In this new reality, media do not merely reflect the world; they produce it through staged scenes, repeatable plots and algorithmic dramaturgy. The script becomes the fundamental principle of social life, an instrument for organising attention and behaviour. It is precisely here that the next step begins: the examination of the media script as the dominant model of contemporary communication, in which society no longer simply narrates itself, but places itself on stage in order to remain in motion.

2. From Narrative to Script

2.1. Script and Psychodrama

How Modern Media Became Psychodrama

'The ultimate goal of psychotherapy is not the cure of individuals, but the healing of humanity.'
— J. L. Moreno

Modern media increasingly resemble psychodrama rather than classical drama. Traditional drama invites the spectator to watch from a distance, to follow a finished story with a clear beginning and end. Psychodrama, by contrast, invites participants to step inside, to play themselves and others, to transform personal conflicts into shared staged experience. It is precisely this logic of entry, participation and enactment of inner tensions that now describes the media environment in which people live. News broadcasts, social networks and even so-called serious commentary formats increasingly resemble endless psychodramatic sessions rather than completed plays. Roles shift constantly, spectators become performers, inner states are externalised, and validation arrives in the form of real-time reactions. The stage never darkens, the curtain never falls, and the distinction between audience and actors dissolves into a continuous circulation of those who watch and those who are watched.

At the core of psychodrama lies the pair spontaneity–creativity, the idea that new and authentic responses are born in the moment of action rather than within a prewritten script. Contemporary media transform this principle into an industrial norm. The hot microphone, the breaking-news ticker, the livestream and the story format reward immediacy at the expense of reflection. Where once a monologue on stage required rehearsal, today the monologue to the camera from a car, a kitchen or a protest emerges improvisationally before thousands or millions. Content thus ceases to be mere information and becomes processing: a public form of therapy in which memory, emotion and role are assembled before an audience. Classical techniques of psychodrama find their digital equivalents. The mirror appears in duets, stitched videos and reaction clips, where one statement is reflected, replayed and retold by others, and in these reflections the speaker recognises new versions of the self. Doubling unfolds in the commentary economy, where influencers, analysts and explainers articulate what you supposedly meant to say, adding their

own meanings to another's words. Role reversal occurs when empathy is simulated for seconds only to be dismantled ironically; the aim is theatrical effect rather than understanding.
Soliloquy, from the Latin soliloquium, to speak alone, is a monologue in which a person voices thoughts aloud without addressing another. In drama it reveals the inner world of a character directly to the audience. The classic example is Hamlet's 'To be or not to be'. Today soliloquy, thinking aloud, has become a mass genre. Podcasts, self-recorded videos and live monologues stabilise identity through a chorus of likes and comments. Auxiliary egos are provided by the audience itself, which immediately occupies missing roles: strict parent, moral tribunal, common sense, the people. In this way dramaturgical tension is sustained. Even the structure of the psychodramatic session can be read in news cycles. The warm-up consists of teasers and 'just asking questions'. The action unfolds in live confrontations, exposures, scandals and brand crises. Sharing appears in the post-event analysis of what we learned, which often opens a new act. Classical drama has a limited number of scenes and a clear authorial arc. Media psychodrama is polymorphic. It branches into countless sub-scenes, changes antagonists and allies by the hour, postpones closure because algorithms prefer the eternal cliffhanger to the completed story. Where drama asks what the story is, psychodrama asks which roles are needed to keep the energy moving. Algorithms cast villains, victims and saviours according to traffic rather than truth.
This psychodramatic form is seductive for several reasons. Identity today is conceived through roles rather than stable labels. People experiment with social masks—whistle-blower, jester, translator, mentor—and the media stage offers a marketplace of selves in which the audience rewards the most effective performances. Spontaneity is taken as proof of authenticity. The imperfect, unprepared moment appears more truthful than measured language. Collective meaning-making also becomes theatrical. In times of crisis, people want not only facts but to see how others experience, interpret and dramatise those facts. Vloggers and streamers externalise inner processes, sometimes leading to insight, sometimes to mass hysteria. The smartphone turns every space into a potential stage and every document into a prop. Yet just as therapeutic psychodrama carries the risk of retraumatisation, group fusion and obsession with intensity at the expense of integration, its media version amplifies the same dangers on a vast scale. Traditional drama preserves something often missing here: frame, measure and closure, which allow reflection. The question is not whether to choose drama or psychodrama, but how to combine them responsibly. This requires an ethics of the stage: guided spontaneity rather than arbitrary outburst, genuine role reversal rather than caricature of the opponent, sharing rather than point-scoring, protection of the protagonist who must not be reduced to target or prop. When media become psychodrama, the task of creators and audiences alike is not to extinguish emotional fire but to give it form, to transform the continuous performance of feeling into a space for understanding and growth rather than a spectacle without memory.

Aristotle for Screenwriters

'In artistic fiction everything is permitted precisely because it is not reality, and yet it often tells the truth better than factual reality.' — Slavoj Žižek

In Michael Tierno's book[29] Aristotle's Poetics for Screenwriters the problem of truth spoken by fictional characters in literature and drama is brought into focus. Truth is never spoken directly,

[29] Tierno, M. (2012). Aristotle's Poetics for Screenwriters. Hachette+ORM.

because the very act of stating it destroys it. It lives in the paradox of concealment, in the zone between deception and insight. Aristotle would say that every story is a search for this balance, an action that leads from ignorance to knowledge. The writer, like the screenwriter, is not a preacher but an architect of illusions in which the spectator must discover the truth alone. 'Never tell the truth to people who do not want to know it' sounds like a director's aphorism, because direct speech in cinema kills imagination, while double speech leads to catharsis. Truth is not a fact but an act; it occurs when the spectator overcomes personal self-deception. From antiquity to the present, great stories follow this law of hidden truth. Dostoevsky calls mystery 'the most precious possession of humanity', because secrecy keeps the human spirit alive. Slavoj Žižek adds that fiction is the 'alibi' through which people allow themselves to express what is too true to be stated openly. Thus every story becomes a therapy of truth through invention. Behind the mask of falsehood the character gains the courage to confront the self. Self-deception, the text suggests, leads to self-hatred, yet it is also an inevitable stage on the path to insight, because only through its destruction does truth emerge as liberation.

Aristotle's Poetics formulates this process in terms of action: mythos (plot), ethos (character), dianoia (thought), lexis (speech), opsis (spectacle) and pathos (emotional response). Drama is not a copy of reality but an imitation of action that produces knowledge. Plot is a structure of incidents that move from good to bad fortune and provoke fear and pity, emotions through which the audience is purified. This process of catharsis is not merely an ending but an inner dynamic that unfolds gradually. A story should have only one goal: catharsis. Everything else is meaningless. The screenwriter, like the ancient tragedian, must weave a self-sufficient world in which actions are logically and emotionally necessary. The character must not suffer by chance but because of personal hamartia, an error of character, a fatal choice that leads to recognition, anagnorisis, and reversal, peripeteia. True drama is a movement from ignorance to knowledge, from self-deception to awareness. Truth manifests not in words but in actions that reveal human nature. In the modern context this movement from falsehood to insight remains the core of the screenwriting art. In drama the truth of human identity fractures in a digital mirror: there is no stable self, only a flow of memories and algorithms. The character realises that the effort to remain the same is a form of enslavement. As in Nietzsche, the gaze into the abyss creates the abyss itself. The mirror does not reflect evil, it produces it. Truth is no longer a moral category but a process of recognising one's own illusoriness. The same paradox appears in classical plots. Cassandra, Prometheus, Pandora and Orpheus are punished for telling the truth. Hermes, the god of communication, is also the god of deception, because mediation itself distorts. Every act of communication is a theatre between truth and deceit, between desire and fear. In this sense the screenwriter is a priest of Hermes, creating illusions in order to transmit the invisible. Aristotle teaches that action is the idea of the story, because it reveals universal truths about human existence. This is why literature is more philosophical than history: it does not describe what has happened, but what could happen. Philosophy follows narrative, because knowledge is born of experience. The true story does not teach facts but possibilities. It shows how a character changes through suffering and choice.

The paradox of the contemporary creator is the same that troubled Jean-Paul Sartre. People on screen have characters, while in life there is only freedom. Characters, like spectators, are condemned to be free, and this places them before moral dilemmas. Writing has no guaranteed outcome; it is an act in which the author is transformed. Language, as Wittgenstein says, is the limit of knowledge; it speaks through people and leads them back to the same problems. Every story is therefore an attempt to breach this limit, to express the inexpressible. Truth in art is like catharsis: it is not declared but experienced. It is not a message but a change in consciousness. The screenwriter must be both philosopher and trickster, concealing revelation within fiction.

Falsehood is the home of truth, because without disguise it cannot be endured. And if, as Eco suggests, a hundred clichés can move us, it is because they repeat the eternal truth of human error. At the edge of the banal the unique is born, and it is precisely there, between mask and gaze, between action and awareness, that true drama lives.

The Art of Dramatic Writing

'Character is not determined by its environment; it creates its environment. It is decisions that determine the direction of a life.' — Lajos Egri

In The Art of Dramatic Writing (1946) Lajos Egri proposes a theory[30] of drama centred on human character and the deep motives that drive it. According to Egri, every person is driven by a desire for immortality: the need to be seen, to matter, to be understood. The need for attention and recognition is not a whim but a fundamental human necessity. It underlies every action and is precisely what turns a character into a dramatic force. In this sense Egri continues Aristotle's line of thought, but inverts it: action is not primary, character is, because character generates action. The key concept in his theory is the premise – the basic, underlying statement of the story. The premise is the thesis of the play, the driving idea, the belt that holds everything together. It can be formulated as a causal sentence: 'Great love conquers even death' (Romeo and Juliet), 'Ruthless ambition leads to self-destruction' (Macbeth), 'Jealousy destroys both itself and the object of its love' (Othello). A well-formulated premise sets the direction of the story and allows one to know where the action is going. A writer may begin without a clear premise, but in the course of the work must discover it, otherwise the plot collapses into arbitrary episodes. Egri understands character as a three-dimensional being – physiological, sociological and psychological – plus time, which manifests itself through memory. A human being, for Egri, is a bundle of contradictions. Here dialectics comes into play: thesis, antithesis, synthesis. Every state contains its own negation and sooner or later gives birth to it. Constant change is the essence of existence, and drama is the art of showing how character changes under the pressure of conflicts and decisions. The growth of the hero is not accidental but the result of a series of confrontations. Conflict is not an external ornament but an organic consequence of the premise and the character. If the premise states that ruthless ambition leads to destruction, a hero obsessed with ambition is required, along with an antagonist equal in strength. The antagonist must not be a mere obstacle but a fully developed character embodying an opposing flaw or an opposing value pole. Through the clash of these figures the dialectical movement from thesis to antithesis and synthesis is realised, that is, the final revelation of the premise.

In The Art of Creative Writing (1965) Egri expands his conception of human nature. He argues that all people are fundamentally selfish and driven by the instinct to be perceived as important. The desire for importance is stronger even than the instinct for self-preservation: self-sacrifice or suicide may also be desperate attempts at significance. Insecurity, the fear of leaving no trace, fuels action. Behind all emotions lies this single motive, disguised in different forms. From this follows his idea of the 'universal human': whatever a character does, it is done to generate sympathy and to demonstrate importance. Originality does not lie in strange plots but in vital characterisation, in creating a living, 'breathing' person in whom the reader recognises the self or

[30] Egri, L. (1946) The Art of Dramatic Writing: Its Basis in the Creative Interpretation of Human Motives. New York: Simon & Schuster.

people they know. Identification arises when the hero's fate appears possible for the spectator as well, and the hero's insecurity produces fear and compassion.
Story movement is driven not by incidents but by characters with clearly articulated dominant passions, often negative ones. This passion seeks to impose itself upon the world, and in the attempt to do so drama is born. A satisfying narrative structure, according to Egri, is one in which two characters with opposing flaws are bound together in a way that inevitably leads to crisis, climax and resolution. In the introduction to his book Egri criticises earlier theories of drama, from Aristotle to Lope de Vega and Lessing, for isolating individual elements such as plot, theme, conflict or the 'obligatory scene' without revealing the unifying force behind them. For him this force is human character with its dialectical contradictions. Premise, character and conflict are the materials with which the dramatist builds. Without deep understanding of these three elements, all 'rules' of structure and technique remain empty. True dramaturgy begins where character, driven by the desire for importance, enters into an inevitable confrontation with the world and through this confrontation proves or disproves the premise of the play.

History of Cinematic Narrative

'Cinema became an art when it ceased merely to record events and began to organize them.'
— Georges Sadoul

Georges Sadoul's History of Film Art[31] is, in essence, a history of the film script – of the moment when cinema gradually discovered that showing was no longer sufficient, and that it had to tell. From the earliest trick films to the complex narratives that emerged after the Second World War, the script moves from an almost non-existent appendage to a central yet once again invisible structure that holds the film together. At the very beginning, there is hardly a script at all. The Brighton School (George Albert Smith, James Williamson, among others) experiments with framing, telescopic vision and early montage ('The Rescue of the Pastor's Daughter', 'The Great Train Robbery'), but 'story' functions merely as a pretext for a visual effect. Films are short, often incoherent; there is no real concept of cinematic narration. When the coronation of Edward VII is 'recreated' in Méliès's Paris studio, we already encounter staging, but not yet dramaturgy in the modern sense. Around 1908 the situation changes: films become longer and the need for structure emerges. Pathé begins negotiations with the Society of Dramatic Authors (SAGL), and theatre writers such as Anatole France, Rostand and Lavedan produce 'scripts' – in reality adaptations of plays and novels. The formula of 'famous actors in famous plays' gives rise to the first consciously constructed cinematic narratives: plot, characters, causality. The script enters cinema through the door of theatre. By 1912 France already employs hundreds of contracted screenwriters, paid by the metre of filmed footage, while novels by Hugo, Balzac and Dumas are adapted into multi-episode forms such as Les Misérables. In parallel, Italy and Denmark develop strong traditions of adaptation and 'Gothic' melodrama: powerful images upon which narrative is subsequently built. At this stage, the script still primarily serves to compress already familiar stories into a new visual format.
In the United States the role of the script changes with industrialisation. Thomas Ince introduces the division between writer, director and editor, placing the producer at the head of production. The film becomes the product of collective labour, and the script the primary instrument for controlling that labour. With Griffith's The Birth of a Nation, we encounter an epic constructed

[31] Georges Sadoul (1973). Histoire générale du cinéma.

through parallel montage and complex narrative – ideologically problematic, yet dramaturgically innovative. After the First World War the script finds itself at a crossroads between experiment and industry. In Germany, UFA supports Expressionism (The Cabinet of Dr Caligari, Metropolis): here the script often functions as a conceptual framework for a visual vision, a sequence of living drawings rather than a psychologically 'realist' narrative. The films of Carl Mayer and Murnau (The Last Laugh) demonstrate how a script can organise subjective experience – the camera follows the inner world, not external events. The French avant-gardes (Delluc, Gance, Dulac, Epstein) go even further: 'pure cinema' without classical plot, metaphorical montage, visual rhymes. Here the script is minimised, sometimes almost denied; what matters is the rhythm of images rather than linear story. This tendency will later return with modernist auteurs, but in the 1920s it remains largely elitist. The Soviet montage school (Eisenstein, Pudovkin, Vertov) transforms the script into an ideological and structural score for editing. The 'script' becomes a plan for semantic collisions between shots, not merely a sequence of scenes. When socialist realism later imposes a clear linear narrative, Soviet cinema moves closer to the Hollywood model: continuity editing, characters, plot – but under a different ideological sign.

In classical Hollywood the script is simultaneously essential and invisible. The studio system, star culture and box-office logic turn stories into products: bestsellers are adapted, plays reworked, genres standardised. The Hays Code imposes moral restrictions which screenwriters circumvent through allegory and implication – paradoxically, censorship stimulates more refined dramaturgy. Authors such as Ben Hecht, Preston Sturges and Hitchcock emerge, fusing script and direction into a recognisable personal style. Sound cinema temporarily returns film to theatre – heavy dialogue, static scenes – but gradually the script learns to use sound, silence and interior monologue. Citizen Kane and Casablanca demonstrate how a script can function as a complex mosaic of viewpoints, flashbacks and clichés arranged to produce a new whole. This is the moment when the screenplay establishes itself as an autonomous literary form, even though it is destined to disappear behind the finished film. After the Second World War, national cinemas – Italian neorealism (De Sica, Zavattini), French poetic and social realism (Renoir, Carné, Duvivier), Japanese cinema (Mizoguchi, Kurosawa) – return the script to the reality of their time. Stories draw closer to the ordinary person, to the street, to national trauma. The script becomes an instrument not only of entertainment, but of testimony and memory. Seen through Sadoul's lens, the history of cinema is therefore, to a large extent, the history of the search for cinematic narration – from attraction to drama, from trick to character, from the visible to the invisible text that organises the world into ninety or one hundred and twenty minutes, and then vanishes behind the light of the screen.

The Invisible Text

'A screenplay is not a finished work. It is a transition, a bridge between the written word and the image on the screen.'
— Jean-Claude Carrière

In The Invisible Text, Jean-Claude Carrière[32] reveals the secret of the screenplay as an art that disappears at the very moment it is realised, and yet through this disappearance gives cinema its living, mutable soul. The invisible text is the true home of cinema. All 'external' theories – genre

[32] Carrière, J.-C. (2003) Le film que je ne vois pas: L'invisible du cinéma. Paris: Éditions Odile Jacob.

formulas, three-act structures, lists of rules – are useful only insofar as they bring one closer to a single thing: the inner logic of the hero's world. The real theory of the screenplay does not come from outside but from within – from the motivations, desires, fears and choices that move the character. Everything else is technique, and technique in itself tells nothing. Cinema is a strange ritual: one can experience it in a dark hall with popcorn and rustling bags, on a television in the living room, on a tablet on a bus. One can pause it, rewind it, abandon it halfway through, or remember it ten years later and watch it again. And then, suddenly, one notices a detail never seen before – a glance, a pause, a background action, a cut. A film is not exhausted by a first viewing; on the contrary, it seems to contain secrets that open only through repetition. This is the work of the invisible text – the screenplay that has not merely been 'performed' but continues to live within the structure of the film.

The screenplay disappears twice. First materially – as a stack of pages or a PDF that no one reads after shooting ends. Then it disappears again inside the film itself: the viewer sees a sequence of events, but the story of desire, goals and the inner trajectory of the character remains hidden. If it is well written, the screenplay is precisely the skeleton of this process – invisible, yet load-bearing. The most important points – reversals, act beginnings, turning points – are either unnoticed or quickly forgotten. This is not a flaw but a sign that the dramaturgy works: the construction is concealed within the experience. There are films without plot that are remembered more easily than complex narratives, because they function as empty containers filled with stereotypical situations and strong images that transport emotion directly. Such films also have their place; they work like music or advertising. But if one speaks of the screenplay as an art, the interesting work begins where the invisible text organises a durable experience that can be revived again and again – by actors, directors, new generations of viewers. Every play and every screenplay carries the potential for renewed life. The words are frozen, yet each new staging or adaptation releases different nuances. Audiences in different eras may feel similar emotions, but read them in new ways. In this sense, the 'invisible text' is not merely hidden; it is alive in the future tense.

Jean Renoir warned that progress in cinema leads to technically 'perfect realism', which goes hand in hand with perfect decadence. When technique becomes flawless, freshness disappears, leaving repetition and refinement of what has already been seen. The most difficult task is to create something new, even at the risk of ugliness. Perfect realism kills the genre; the drive towards the new gives birth to abstract ugliness. But in both cases technique resolves nothing – what matters is the inner necessity of the story. The great artist, Renoir says, overcomes technique; one swims with the current but chooses one's own waves. When technique becomes absolutely accessible – cameras in phones, editing on laptops, effects with a single click – professionalism as a closed guild will die. And then, paradoxically, cinema may become a freer art. In such an era the screenplay will be even more invisible, because everyone will be able to film, but few will be able to tell a story.

Sir David Hare has said that the screenwriter is the person who writes the 'invitation to the party'. If it is a good invitation, many talented people will come – directors, actors, cinematographers – and bring their own ideas. The screenwriter spends more time defending and presenting this invitation than writing it. Film is collective labour, and the initial text is constantly altered, torn apart, rewritten. This is why the screenplay is the most open of all texts – full of white spaces waiting to be filled. And precisely for that reason it disappears and is forgotten most easily. Yet in this capacity for disappearance lies its strength. The invisible text does not want to be seen; it wants to be experienced. If, years later, one returns to a film and feels that it still 'holds', that beneath the images there is an arc, a transformation, a meaning, this means that somewhere at the

beginning there was a good, truthful screenplay. Not a manual of technique, but an inner map of a human world that continues to unfold beyond the final credits.

The Role of the Author

'Tragedy is an imitation of an action… and the action is the end for which the characters exist.'
— Aristotle

The essence of literature and the role of the author, as presented in the lectures[33] of Professor Louis Markos, From Plato to Postmodernism, constitute a journey from the ancient understanding of art as imitation of reality to the postmodern idea of the author as a node within a network of signs, structures, and contexts. In antiquity, Aristotle understands art as mimesis – the imitation of action, praxis – which generates mythos, a meaningful order that gives form and unity to human experience. Myth is an organised reality, a world of causality and necessity that renders the chaos of existence intelligible. Within it, events are arranged according to probability and inevitability, so that the hero's experience appears not only logical but just. The hero passes through peripeteia – a sudden reversal of fortune – and reaches anagnorisis, recognition, self-knowledge, a movement from ignorance to illumination. This movement of consciousness produces catharsis – purification through suffering – which restores order to the world and harmony between human beings and fate. For Aristotle, it is precisely action, not character, that lies at the foundation of good tragedy, because it is through action that the lawfulness of the world is revealed. Yet Louis Markos emphasises that character itself becomes fate: if Oedipus had avoided the prophecy, the world would have remained chaotic, without order or meaning.

The transition to modernity radically alters this logic. The late nineteenth century, the era of Victorian stability, gives rise to modernism as a revolt against logocentrism – the belief that Logos, word or reason, is the sole source of truth and order. In classical thought, Logos is the bond between idea and matter, spirit and body, meaning and form. Modernism shatters this dualism. According to Markos, its 'four horsemen' – Freud, Darwin, Marx, and Nietzsche – displace the centre of human knowledge. Freud elevates the unconscious above reason, Darwin places evolution and matter above spirit, Marx replaces moral structure with economic determination, and Nietzsche rejects absolute truths. Art thus loses its transcendent status and becomes a cultural product. Instead of God creating the world, human beings begin to create their own myths and to believe in them as divine revelations. Modernism is therefore also a crisis of faith – not only in religion, but in the author as a source of truth.

This transformation deepens in the twentieth century with the emergence of structuralism. Structure replaces Logos as the organising principle of order. The world is no longer founded on eternal ideas, but on systems of signs and relations. Language becomes the model for all human activities – economy, culture, politics. Meaning does not exist in advance; it arises from differences between words. Each sign is an arbitrary link between sound and concept, sustained by social consensus and the power of habit. Human beings are no longer creators of meaning, but its carriers. They think through the structures in which they are immersed. Existence – being within a concrete context – displaces essence, abstract substance. Thus the formula emerges: existence precedes essence. In this context, the role of the author undergoes a profound transformation. If in antiquity the creator was a mediator between chaos and order, in modernity

[33] Marcos, L. (2012) From Plato to Postmodernism: Understanding the Essence of Literature and the Role of the Author. The Great Courses, Virginia: The Teaching Company.

the author becomes an interpreter of chaos. After structuralism, as Markos shows, the author is no longer the source of meaning, but an element within a larger system of cultural and linguistic signs. The literary text is not understood through authorial intention, but through the network of relations in which it participates. Meaning does not reside in words themselves, but emerges from their differences and from the context that sustains them. Analysis therefore becomes an investigation of systems rather than personalities. Deconstruction, as a logical continuation of structuralism, seeks not meaning but gaps, cracks in the structure – moments where the authority of language wavers and reveals its conditional nature.

Postmodernism brings this process to its conclusion by proclaiming the 'death of the author'. Literature is no longer a reflection of a unified world, but a play of perspectives, quotations, and texts. Reality itself becomes a text, and the author merely a part of its self-writing. According to Louis Markos, this does not mean the disappearance of creativity, but its democratisation: every reader becomes a co-author, every reading a new interpretation. The world of literature is no longer a world of final meanings, but one of movement and transformation, where meaning is born in the act of reading, just as Aristotle's hero discovers himself through peripeteia. Ultimately, the history of literature, from Plato to postmodernism, is the history of faith in the human word – from the mythological imitation of reality to the self-conscious play of language with itself. And perhaps, as Markos suggests, the task of the author today is not to imitate the world, but to remind us that the world itself has already become a story, waiting to be told.

This Is Not the End of Stories

'The book is like the wheel, or the scissors. Once they have been invented, they cannot be improved.'
— Umberto Eco

Digital media, smart devices, and artificial intelligence are not the end of storytelling. They mark the beginning of another epoch—an anti-Gutenberg civilisation in which the image displaces the letter and speed replaces patience. And yet, as Umberto Eco and Jean-Claude Carrière warn in This Is Not the End of Books[34], we should not expect to rid ourselves of books. The paper book is one of the few human inventions that cannot be perfected. It is a finished form, complete in its simplicity, tested across centuries. No hard drive lasts that long. And when Dan Brown tells Eco that he likes his books, and Eco replies, 'It's not that I don't like you—I created you,' this is a playful metaphor for the continuation of book civilisation in the digital age: today's bestsellers are the shadows of an old and enduring model. The new century, however, truly changes the way people read, remember, and forget. In the seventeenth century, a single scholar could still be familiar with all scientific publications; today, no one can grasp the avalanche of information. The world of knowledge turns into noise, and reading becomes scanning screens. In the age of hyperlinks, the community of readers fragments, as each person follows a private trajectory of references and comments. The information flow is endless and at the same time fragile—art no longer lies in remembering, but in forgetting. Daoist wisdom teaches: 'Discard something every day.' Memory without organisation is meaningless. Knowledge requires limits in order to have value. Flaubert observed that stupidity is the desire to reach final conclusions. The fool wants to close the conversation; the wise leave it open. In the digital era, universal education and accessible media turn everyone into a speaker: everyone wants to be heard, even when there is

[34] Eco, U. & Carrière, J.-C. (2010) This Is Not the End of the Book. London: Harvill Secker.

nothing to say. The internet is a paradox—a space of eternal memory and simultaneous disappearance. History knows the erasure of memory, from Roman damnatio memoriae to the removal of Beria from Soviet encyclopaedias. Today we face the opposite: the impossibility of forgetting.

The burning of books has always been a symbolic attempt to reorder the world. In 1968, a group of writers around Maurice Blanchot proclaimed that words must be liberated from the book. Knowledge should not remain captive but return to people. This was a revolt against institutionalised wisdom—against the idea that truth lives in libraries. Yet every discovery of new knowledge also creates new ignorance: the more people learn, the more they lose their bearings. Printing itself is an ambivalent invention. The Chinese discovered printing first, but they used entire blocks of symbols rather than individual letters. The alphabet, which allows infinite combinations, also produces infinite errors. Printing is a technology of imperfection—of the counterfeit. Reading is not seeing but recognising; an act of cognition in which the reader does not participate in creation but merely deciphers symbols. Visual culture alters this rhythm: the screen opens the space of the image but diminishes the participation of imagination. Film, television, and the internet displace the book not through content but through sensation. The history of cinema begins with documentation—The Sprinkler Sprinkled from 1895—but audiences were struck not by the plot, but by the movement of leaves in the trees. Soon reality proved too poor, and fiction began. Georges Méliès staged the coronation of King Edward not in London but in Paris, and audiences believed it. This was the birth of the media lie, voluntarily accepted by the public. As Adorno notes, viewers know they are being deceived, yet they approve, because the lie has become a form of comfort. Democracy, in this sense, turns into governance through staging—a pact between spectator and director, a contract between illusion and pleasure.

Umberto Eco argues that reality is textual—knowledge is always narrative. Now that text becomes digital, the very fabric of reality changes. There is not only the possibility of reading, but of editing, deleting, rewriting. Truth becomes mobile, as does memory. The new culture is hypertextual; it knows no completion. And yet stories do not die. They merely change form. From the printed page to the screen's flow, from the typographic line to the moving image, they continue to fulfil the same function: giving meaning to chaos. Narrative remains the fundamental human strategy for understanding time, action, and change. Without it there is no identity, no history, no humanity. In the anti-Gutenberg civilisation, the book may lose its body but not its soul: every story told, remembered, or lived is a new form of the book. That is why this is not the end of stories, but their new incarnation—not on paper, but in consciousness. Perhaps the destiny of artificial intelligence is to become the collective memory and consciousness of humanity itself—a virtual space in which stories in all human languages coexist simultaneously and remain in constant relation.

Why Is the Lie Necessary?

'The masses know that the culture industry deceives them, but they nonetheless demand this deception.'
— Theodor W. Adorno

The lie is a fundamental mechanism of human communication. Technologies do not merely reproduce it; they refine it, because every new medium of expression strives to create illusion—to make the invented convincing. From the first photographic experiments to social media,

technologies have developed in the direction of fiction, simulation, and ever more sophisticated distance from truth. The history of media can be read as a history of the perfected lie. When Georges Méliès staged the coronation of King Edward VII in Paris in 1902, audiences believed they were watching a documentary film. This was the first great media trick, proof that the spectator desires deception, provided that the deception is compelling.

Television, born out of cinema, preserves this principle: reality is always staged. Even news broadcasts, which claim objectivity, are scripts in which facts are subordinated to the dramaturgical logic of effect. Adorno was the first to articulate the paradox clearly: the audience senses that it is being deceived, yet tolerates and even endorses the lie in the absence of a preferable alternative. Thus, a silent contract is formed between viewer and medium—a 'pleasure-for-deception' agreement. This is the psychology of staged democracy, in which politics functions as theatre and truth is replaced by negotiated expectations. The lie becomes a form of social hygiene: it simplifies reality, makes it more digestible, more manageable, more controllable. The script-like structure of media is the result of this evolution. Drama has become the model for the news, not the other way around. Drama requires protagonists, antagonists, conflict, and resolution; without these there is no story, and without story there is no attention. An audience that expects catharsis no longer seeks information but experience. Truth loses its value when it ceases to provoke emotion. For this reason, the television script, however fictitious, is often perceived as more 'truthful' than reality itself. The lie is not a defect of the system but a structural necessity—without it there is no story.

Jürgen Habermas describes this condition as a pathology of institutions: the same forces that push the individual towards neurosis drive society towards bureaucratic forms of pseudo-normality. Democracy itself becomes governance through staging. Power speaks in a language that conceals rather than reveals. Truth would shatter the façade of 'order'; therefore institutions require the lie in the same way an organism requires skin—as protection from the outside world. Pseudo-normality sustains the social theatre in which everyone has a role and a line, but not a voice. At the foundation of all this lies narrative. Professor Angus Fletcher of Ohio State University calls storytelling 'the primary human strategy for processing time, action, and change'. Stories do not merely describe the world; they create it. The lie, therefore, is not the opposite of truth but a tool for meaning-making. Narrative structures chaos, giving form to the endless flow of events, and this form is always selective, partial, and deceptive. Narrative theory shows that meaning arises not from factual accuracy but from the way facts are arranged. Even science, in its explanations, follows narrative logic: hypothesis, conflict, evidence, resolution. Fletcher identifies thirteen cognitive effects of literature—from wonder and nostalgia to alienation and belief—all of them modes of experiencing the world through fiction. Fiction is not an escape but a form of knowledge. Truth requires invention in order to be felt. In this sense, technology, which amplifies fiction, does not make people more foolish, but more sensitive to the ways in which they think and feel through stories.

In the art of the script, as in the media, the lie becomes a method of influence. The author knows that the viewer's brain responds predictably—to fear and pity, to pain and pleasure. These two emotions, which Aristotle identified as the core of tragedy, are consciously deployed by screenwriters, politicians, and advertisers alike. They do not merely inform; they stimulate. Rational explanation destroys magic; emotional deception restores it. This is why the true author, as Fletcher argues, must be cruel to the audience—must deceive it in order to make it feel. From this perspective, the lie is not a moral failure but an aesthetic and cognitive function. It builds a stage on which the spectator can experience fear and pity without being destroyed by them. Media democracy is theatrical by nature—governance through staging, through stories that provide a shared sense of reality. And if the future appears 'pharmaceutical', as it has been

ironically described, it is because society seeks not truth but consolation. This is why the lie is necessary: it is the medicine that allows humans to endure the complexity of the world by transforming it into story. Without it there is no art, no politics, no social imagination. Truth, stated without form, is unbearable; spoken through the lie, it becomes knowledge. And if the media function as a school of deception, it is because deception is precisely where the capacity to distinguish, to choose, and to think is born. The lie does not destroy truth—it produces it.

Hollywood versus America

'Hollywood has become a chief villain in the cultural decline of America.'
— Michael Medved

In 1992 Michael Medved published the book[35] Hollywood vs. America: Popular Culture and the War on Traditional Values, one of the sharpest manifestos against what he sees as the moral collapse of the American film industry. His thesis is simple and disturbing: the former 'dream factory' has turned into a 'poison factory'. Hollywood no longer reflects traditional American values but actively undermines them. The romantic bond between audience and cinema has come to an end, replaced by a sense of betrayal and cynicism. Entertainment that once inspired is now perceived as a hostile force attacking the family, faith, and moral foundations of the nation. According to Medved, research shows a sharp increase in screen violence, mockery of religion and marriage, and images that normalise vice. The audience feels not merely disappointed but insulted. And yet, although cinema attendance declines after 1991, ticket prices rise and studios continue to produce the same kinds of films—not because people want them, but because the system serves a specific, elite audience. The real disease, Medved argues, is not economic but spiritual: Hollywood has lost respect for the values of American families. Religion, work, patriotism, self-discipline, and good manners are displaced by a cult of perversity and hedonism. Films that once celebrated heroism now elevate the criminal as a symbol of freedom. Medved cites examples such as The Silence of the Lambs, where the human body becomes a spectacle for sadistic pleasure. Hollywood, he claims, has begun to sympathise with evil. Moral dilemmas are replaced by form, shock, and effect. The postmodern art that dominates the screen prides itself on having no taste, cultivating tastelessness as a new aesthetic. In this culture of nihilism, the only remaining value is fame. The message is blunt: to be rich and desirable is the highest goal. Happy marriages do not sell tickets, while children are cast as voices of wisdom opposed to 'stupid' parents. This inversion of roles reflects the new market logic of cinema, in which youthful audiences dictate content and adult values are treated as obsolete.

Medved sees this trend as part of a deeper cultural rupture between elites and society. The postmodern artist, he argues, no longer seeks to cultivate taste but to scandalise. Offence becomes a badge of authenticity. Radical artistic positions reject the very idea of beauty and measure. Cinema, which should be a space of shared experience, turns into an arena of cultural disintegration. And yet the human fascination with love, mystery, violence, and heroism remains universal. Hollywood understands this perfectly and exploits these instincts with great skill, even as it distances itself from its moral roots. This is why the conflict between ethics and the market remains unresolved: cinema needs spectacle, and spectacle feeds on sin. At the core of this conflict lies a deeper question about the image and the viewer. What do we really see when we watch a film? Cinema is an art of the invisible. Every film contains a shadow zone—something

[35] Medved, M. (1993). Hollywood vs. America. New York, Ny: Harperperennial.

we cannot or do not want to see. Meaning, Medved suggests, is created not by the individual shot but by montage, by the relations between images. This grammar of images shapes consciousness without our awareness. Television and the internet dissolve the boundary between truth and fiction, transforming the world into an endless stream of images that make us feel like participants while we remain isolated observers. Television becomes a 'machine of forgetting': it shows everything and leaves no trace. In this visual world we no longer encounter reality, only its representations. The home becomes a fortress of passivity, the viewer a captive of comfort. Hollywood, once a mirror of America, has become its dream—a dream in which the illusion of freedom conceals a surrender of meaning.

Medved concludes with a warning: if cinema loses its moral centre, America will lose its cultural compass. The solution is not censorship but responsibility—a renewed respect for the audience and for the very idea of truth in art. Because when the dream factory becomes a poison factory, it is not only cinema that dies, but society's capacity to dream.

2.2. How To Write A Script?

The Story According to Robert McKee

'Story is about principles, not rules. True character is revealed in the choices a human being makes under pressure—the greater the pressure, the deeper the revelation.'
— Robert McKee

In his book[36] Story: Substance, Structure, Style and the Principles of Screenwriting (1997), Robert McKee presents the fundamental laws of dramaturgy and the construction of meaningful cinematic narrative. At the core of every effective story lies the illusion of truth. The audience does not believe in reality itself, but in its convincing imitation. The first stage, which McKee calls 'the world of the character', establishes a balance between the positive and negative values of the central dramatic value. Life appears stable, even banal. Everything follows its habitual course until something disturbs the equilibrium—an event that opens an abyss of possibilities. This event is the inciting incident, the moment when balance is shattered and a new desire is born. The protagonist reacts by attempting to restore order, yet within this very action a new direction emerges. Desires are often double: one conscious, one unconscious. The first governs external behaviour, the second shapes the inner journey. A story truly begins when the character pursues desire despite the forces of antagonism—social, psychological, or natural. The inciting incident may occur by chance or as the result of a deliberate choice, but in all cases it must happen on screen, before the viewer's eyes.

What follows is the hook—the dilemma. This is the central dramatic question that sustains tension: will the protagonist succeed, and if so, at what cost? The hook generates the audience's hunger for answers, while the climax represents the promised outcome. On the path toward it, the character confronts a series of escalating conflicts with antagonistic forces. Each crisis transforms the character, stripping away illusions and turning vague longing into lived experience. Only through suffering and loss can true character be revealed. The fourth step McKee calls progress or development. This development unfolds on several levels. Social

[36] McKee, R. (1997). Story: Substance, Structure, Style, and the Principles of Screenwriting. London: Methuen.

development shows the character's impact on the community; personal development traces inner transformation; symbolic development reveals how actions acquire metaphorical meaning; ironic development exposes the paradoxes of existence, the gap between appearance and reality. All these lines converge toward an inevitable point—the crisis, where the true value of human choice is revealed. The crisis is the ultimate test. At this moment there are no alternatives, no tomorrow, no second chance. The protagonist faces a final choice: to remain faithful to core values or to surrender. This scene exposes the deepest value of the story—life itself. In the crisis life appears fragile, almost powerless, yet still retains a minimal chance of victory, a final spark of hope that often comes from others: a friend, an ally, or even from the audience's compassion. Then comes the climax—the greatest turning point. It need not be spectacular, but it must be rich in meaning. Here the final and irreversible change in values takes place, the enduring metamorphosis of life. This action requires no explanation or dialogue; it speaks across all languages through pure emotion. When meaning becomes feeling, the story reaches completion. After the climax comes the resolution—the slow curtain. Once the conscious desire is fulfilled or lost, the secondary storyline comes to the foreground, carrying the unconscious desire. It is this strand that delivers the message the viewer takes away. While the main plot is driven by action, the secondary plot concludes with an ironic turn that reveals a truth about human nature: every victory contains loss, and every loss brings insight.

McKee emphasises that the foundation of plot is movement and progressive complication. A story must move forward without retreat. Once the abyss of possibilities is opened, there can be no return to initial calm. The character faces ever greater trials and inevitably needs help, because no one survives alone. The goal is not the character's peace, but the audience's catharsis. The protagonist may suffer, but the viewer must be released. At the base of everything lies the law of conflict. Every desire generates resistance; every action provokes a counteraction. Nothing of value is achieved easily. Life itself is a conflict between desire and death. The world strives for comfort and the illusion of harmony, yet beneath the surface operates a constant lack, an eternal absence that generates movement. Conflict is the energy of being. If it is removed from one domain, it will appear in another, because the level of tension in the human world is constant. Every scene is a miniature story built around a change in some human value. Without change there is no development. Surprise, ambiguity, and tension are its signs. The character does not know what is good or evil, what is right or wrong. Choices become increasingly complex, and the initial calm is irretrievably lost. The consequences of each action lead to new conflict, because only through conflict does a story acquire meaning. Conflict is its breath, and forward movement is the only law of life.

The Gap of Expectation

'The gap between expectation and result creates the energy of drama. Story is driven by the revelation of the gap between what a character expects to happen and what actually happens.'
— Robert McKee

Robert McKee defines the gap of expectation as a central category of dramaturgy: the moment when action shatters anticipation and opens space for surprise, discovery, and new meaning. A turning point occurs when the expectations of both character and audience collapse. Its effects are fourfold: surprise, curiosity, discovery, and a new direction. 'What? Why? Ah! Where to?'—this is the rhythm through which the world of story responds differently from everyday life. The master storyteller plants 'hooks' and 'traps' in advance—layers of knowledge that later receive

explanation. These traps are written backwards: first the explanation is conceived, then the clue is placed. This reverse tracking creates emotional attachment to character and story. Emotions operate on two poles—positive and negative: pleasure, excitement, ecstasy versus pain, anxiety, sadness, horror. Story must orchestrate a dynamic alternation between them in order to condense an aftertaste—a singular mood that endures. The path to this feeling is singular: structure. Introduction to the character's world. Inciting incident. An opened gap. Reaction. Conflict. Emotion. A shift in values. Final feeling. If one jumps directly to 'feeling', drama disappears; what remains is a concert or museum emotion without shared experience with the characters. Cinema is not decorative photography or a publicity campaign for stars. A good screenplay functions regardless of who plays the lead; its aim is catharsis. Without it there is only pseudo-story—addictive, serially reproducible, but without irreversibility or meaning.

The nature of choice determines the substance of character. A turning point is a choice under pressure that triggers action toward an external or internal desire. A human being inevitably chooses what appears good at that moment; this perception reveals true nature. Character is constructed not by words but by a sequence of choices with a lawful, though unknown, outcome. The true dilemma is not between good and evil, but between two equally weighted possibilities when the correct move is not visible. Then the 'twisted world' forces a confessional gesture and character is laid bare. Every text lives on two levels—text and subtext. In cinema the latter is easily lost if one relies solely on dialogue. Dialogue draws the surface; subtext traces the inner life. Responsibility for it must not be left only to director or actors; it must be embedded in the screenplay. If a scene is 'about what it seems to be about', the actor has nothing to play. Acting is a lie more than once: the actor 'lies' that they are the character; the storyteller 'lies' about the character; the character 'lies' about themselves. This braid creates a space of play—the gap between what is said and true motivation. Scene construction follows a clear analysis. First: identify the core conflict—desire versus obstacles, with obstacles as the essence. Second: state the opening value—love, faith, loyalty—and its current charge. Third: break the scene into mini-clashes of action and reaction. Fourth: reveal the final value and its change. If there is no shift, the scene is flat. Fifth: mark the turning point.

The principle of antagonism dictates the force of impact. Heroism and meaning are as deep as the opposing forces are strong. Human nature seeks economy and routine; the antagonist breaks inertia and opens a gap to be filled with new meaning. Without antagonism there is no change, no character, no climax. Story advances not through a simple good–evil battle but across a spectrum from positive through neutral to negative and absolute negation. Reaching the lowest point makes true light possible. Narrative is action, not description. Facts are absorbed incidentally; revelation unfolds by gradation at the precise moment for maximum effect. The centre of moral gravity lies with the most contradictory character; otherwise sympathy migrates and the film loses both emotion and audience. The protagonist is not a 'person' but an artistic construct—unfinished, leaving space for performance. Credibility is built through hints and actions, not explanations; choices under pressure reveal character. Finally, dialogue: it is not real conversation but a crafted imitation. Meaning resides in subtext, pauses, unanswered questions. When structure guides emotion and choice meets equal resistance, the ending arrives as irreversible meaning. This is catharsis—the release from fear and pity—and the reason stories endure long after the final frame.

Character as Destiny

'The protagonist must make a choice from which there is no return; this decision shapes everything that follows.'
— Robert McKee

True cinema does not recount incidents; it reveals the development of character. For Robert McKee, the screenplay is a narrative of moral dilemmas and actions. In this sense, a character's true nature is their destiny. The audience should absorb necessary facts effortlessly, as if in passing, rather than through explanation. Story advances by the progressive revelation of information, with rising intensity, like a detective novel in which each new secret illuminates the previous one. McKee warns: do not waste your secrets. Reveal them at the precise moment when their impact is strongest. This is how dramatic tension is built—a continuous rhythm of surprise and satisfaction that keeps attention alive. The moral centre always resides in the protagonist, even when that figure is antagonistic or morally ambiguous. Audiences do not love abstract ideas; they love flesh-and-blood people, even when invented. What matters is that the character functions as a metaphor for the human being—contradictory, inconsistent, sometimes absurd, yet unmistakably human. Character is not a copy of a real person but an artistic construct, a work of art that unites logic and irrationality, reason and passion. These contradictions are what make a character live. When a protagonist is overly rational and virtuous, they are forgotten; when unpredictable and flawed, they are loved. This is the secret of attachment: sympathy migrates toward inner conflict. Better to be loved and hated than to be forgotten.

A memorable character must remain 'unfinished'. They are not the author's puppet but an autonomous bearer of character. The actor's task is not to deliver predetermined lines but to discover the inner engine of the role—desires, fears, and choices. Every actor must be clear about five questions: what do I want, why do I want it, how will I get it, what stands in my way, and what are the consequences. The answers establish the character's inner logic. Character is destiny; one cannot escape one's own nature. Every trait must be motivated rather than explained through dialogue. True character is revealed by actions and choices, not by words. In this way the character becomes a lesson in self-knowledge: through them the viewer understands not only the fiction but themselves. Dialogue, McKee insists, is the most deceptive element of cinema. It is not conversation but an imitation of conversation—a crafted falsehood behind which meaning hides. In everyday life people speak to fill silence; in cinema characters speak to conceal their thoughts. The meaning of a scene never lies in what is said but in what is withheld. If a scene is 'about what it appears to be about', actors have nothing to play. Subtext is the space of drama, the hidden engine of behaviour. Every line must carry a second layer—a lie, a secret, or tension between what is spoken and what is thought. The true protagonist always lives in self-deception, and if happiness arrives at the end, it comes from discovering a truth about oneself.

Stories are how people apprehend reality; their quality shapes the quality of life in any era. In every good story events are logically connected, and their sequence reveals a human value—honour, love, faith, courage, or forgiveness. Narrative is the movement of values through time. The protagonist changes not only circumstances but their inner hierarchy: what matters more—love or freedom, justice or mercy, truth or peace. From this change arises catharsis—the cleansing of fear and pity that liberates the viewer. The aim of cinema is not pleasure but understanding through emotion. Concerts and museums offer enjoyment; film must offer meaning. For McKee, every story is a journey from ignorance to knowledge, from illusion to truth. The protagonist acts, errs, suffers, and finally understands. Action is thought in motion; thought is action at rest. When the viewer perceives the outcome of this process, the 'aha' moment arrives—the revelation in which artistic experience becomes human awareness. This is

the boundary that separates a good film from the imitation of a film: a true story does not offer entertainment but catharsis—that deep, silent insight that life, however contradictory, remains the greatest story ever told.

Scriptwriting

'Life can only be understood backwards; but it must be lived forwards.'
— Søren Kierkegaard

This thought contains the entire philosophy of scriptwriting. The ending gives meaning to everything that precedes it. A life that has been understood becomes a story—a sequence of actions, decisions, and consequences that acquire significance only when read back from the ending. Without an ending there is no story, and without meaning there is no life. The drive toward an ending, toward completion, is the fundamental engine of every narrative, and the death of the protagonist is its purest and most complete expression. Billy Wilder, one of the greatest masters of the screenplay, formulated nine simple but ruthless principles. The audience is indecisive and does not know what it wants, so the author must grab it by the throat and never let go. The protagonist must have a clear direction and goal, and the author must know where the story is going. The more elegantly the turning points are concealed, the greater the mastery. Problems in the third act are always problems seeded in the first. Let the viewer add 'two and two' themselves and they will love the story. The event at the end of the second act must flow directly into the beginning of the finale, and after the climax there is no need for prolonged delay. Scriptwriting is a discipline of values. A story is not driven by coincidence but by shifts in values—each choice rearranges the moral coordinate system. Values always exist in binary pairs: life–death, love–hate, freedom–slavery, courage–fear, wisdom–foolishness. When one value flips into its opposite, an event occurs. This shift is the turning point through which the viewer realises that something essential has changed. Conflict is the result of a collision of values, and dramaturgy is the art of discovering meaning within these collisions. Every scene contains its own small change of values. The accumulation of these changes builds the arc of the story—the protagonist's path from one moral position toward its negation or transcendence. An act is a group of scenes unified by a particular culmination of values. Thus the classical design of narrative gradually emerges: an active protagonist struggling against external forces to achieve a goal, moving through a sequence of logically connected events toward a complete and irreversible ending. In this model there are no accidents, only linear order, clear conflict, a single central character, and a coherent reality. Meaning in a good screenplay is achieved through emotion. Story unites thought and feeling into a single aesthetic experience—simultaneously understanding and shared emotion. Narrative asks the question 'What would happen if…'—that magical conditional phrase that opens a space of possibility and becomes the controlling idea. The central idea of a film is not explained but dramatized. It exists between two opposing values and reveals itself through action. Opposed to it always stands a counter-idea, because without opposition there is no truth. In the climax one prevails, and the viewer experiences the insight: 'Ah, that is how life is.' Irony gives durability to this insight, because it unites idealism and pessimism, realism and hope.

Character is the core of every story. It is revealed not through words but through choices under pressure. A person is what they do when standing at the edge of the abyss. The protagonist's desire creates the future of the story, and the gap between desire and reality generates narrative energy. The greater this gap, the stronger the drama. The protagonist must have will, opportunity,

and at least a minimal chance of victory. The audience believes not the character's words but the risk they take. The object of desire is merely a tool; the true meaning lies in the revelation of character. Every choice strips the character bare; every failure brings them closer to their own truth. The worst thing that can happen to the protagonist is also the most necessary—to reach the limits of human existence. The audience demands this risk, because it is precisely there that catharsis resides—the release from fear and pity. The ending must be strong and irreversible. After it, there can be no continuation, because meaning has been achieved. In the final moment the hidden nature of the character is revealed and the viewer experiences relief. Catharsis is a shared experience of humanity: the understanding that life is contradictory, yet worthy of compassion. In the abyss between desire and reality, the human being discovers themselves, and the story ends where true understanding begins—in the shared silence after the end.

How To Write a Script?

'Story is a metaphor for life. A story begins when something changes.'
— John Truby

The end of a story is impossible. The end of every narrative is the beginning of a new one. Every ending is the death of one character and the birth of the next. The screenplay is built on the principle of continuity: a new life emerges from previous experience, and a new story from a previous story. It is not born out of nothing, but out of living human experience. The clichés of television and the secondary circulation of news on social networks cannot provide this vitality, because they are derived from imitations. A true screenplay begins with the living voice, with the observation of real people, and with a concrete situation in which a universal meaning reveals itself. Storytelling has the function of taming chaos and giving order to our knowledge of death. The beginning sets direction, and the ending gives meaning. Every action in a screenplay is an attempt to find order within the disorder of life. If the character lingers too long, if they refuse change or resist the ending, they turn into an empty shell—a figure without a reason to exist. Life itself acquires meaning only when it is understood backwards from its end. The screen character is always specific, yet universal: an ordinary person carrying within themselves a contradiction between tenderness and sharpness, between guilt and dignity. They are not a symbol, but an extraction from reality, constructed from observation, habits, and language that make them believable. The true character is always imperfect. They are alive because they change.

Narrative structure is not a mechanical scheme, but the breathing of drama. The five acts create a rhythm that allows movement between action and reflection. In the first act, the character's normal world is established—their daily routine, small defeats, and sense of injustice. This is followed by the inciting incident—a small but irreversible push that breaks equilibrium and sets action in motion. At this moment, the story's 'promise' is also planted: an object, phrase, or gesture that will be paid off in the ending. The second act shows how the character enters the new situation and begins to adapt. Here the dilemma emerges—the conflict between the old and the new self, between safety and risk. The third act is the territory of action and rising cost. The character begins to pay—with time, love, security. The midpoint marks a moment of no return: something is staked that cannot be restored. From this point on, every scene leads toward a test. In the fourth act, complications arise. External conflict merges with internal conflict—the effort to maintain direction collides with fatigue, loneliness, and disappointment. A crisis occurs in which the character's essence is revealed. Confronted with the limits of their strength, they realise not so much what they want, but why they want it. The fifth act leads to the climax—the

moment when external and internal goals coincide. Victory or defeat becomes secondary; what matters is the moral insight that gives meaning to what has been endured. The ending is not merely a conclusion, but a new equilibrium—a quiet understanding of the character's place in the world. The first and last scenes must answer each other like question and response: this is where we began, this is where we are now. The story closes not with a happy or sad ending, but with a sense of completion—that moment when the audience understands that the character has recognised their own humanity. External turning points—inciting incident, plan, point of no return, crisis, climax—form the skeleton of the action. Internal ones—promise, dilemma, reaction, deepening, realisation—are its emotional tissue. When the two merge, authentic catharsis is born: the character may lose everything, yet gain themselves. Thus drama ceases to be mere plot and becomes a moral experience.

Cinema is the art of action, but montage is its morality—the order of shots reveals the order of values. Dialogue should not replace behaviour, but express the tension between words and gestures. Recurrent motifs—an object, a sound, a line—create a sense of fate. Every scene must have a price: if it costs nothing, it changes nothing. A screenplay is not simply a text, but a structure of experience. It is an agreement between chaos and form, between life and meaning. Its ending does not close the story, but turns it into the foundation for the next one. Because in cinema, as in life, there is no final scene—only a new beginning born from an understood ending.

The Structure of the Script

'Nothing moves forward in a story except through conflict.'
— Robert McKee

Every screenplay follows the rhythm of human life—birth, trial, insight, and end. This sequence is not a mechanical scheme but a universal law of storytelling, one that binds the character's actions to their inner transformation. Cinema turns this law into a clear dramaturgical construction that can be traced like a pulse, measured in percentages of a film's duration. It outlines both the external, social journey of the character—their adventures, obstacles, and decisions—and the internal, emotional journey in which personal awareness unfolds.

Part One – 'In the World of the Hero' (0–10%)
This is the zone of equilibrium. The character is presented within their habitual environment, the familiar world that must be disrupted. Habits, relationships, and rules are shown—the elements that shape identity. Within roughly the first five per cent, the 'Hook' appears: the viewer is caught by an image, situation, or line that sparks curiosity and subconsciously promises meaning. This hook will only be 'paid off' in the ending. At ten per cent comes the first major turning point—the 'Inciting Incident'. This is the event that breaks order, introduces conflict, and places the character in a new situation.

Part Two – 'A New Situation' (10–25%)
The character attempts to orient themselves within the changed world. The new circumstances destabilise them, and around seventeen per cent the 'Dilemma' emerges—the moral choice that determines further development. Will the character act from fear or from conscience? Will they accept risk or remain in safety? At the end of this act, around twenty-five per cent, comes the second point of change—the 'Change of Plan'. The character formulates a goal and direction, makes a conscious decision, and enters a new phase of action.

Part Three – ‘Progress’ (25–50%)
This is the stage of effort and growth. The character moves forward, accumulates experience and mistakes, and begins to pay the price for their decisions. Around thirty per cent comes the inner turning point of ‘Reaction’—the first genuine response to conflict, where character begins to show itself. Later, around forty-five per cent, comes ‘Deepening’: a renewed confrontation with the dilemma, now at a higher level; the character begins to grasp the consequences of their actions. At fifty per cent arrives the third external turning point—‘No Return’. After this, there is no safe ground left, and the stakes become irreversible.

Part Four – ‘Complications and Risks’ (50–75%)
Conflicts intensify, alliances collapse, time tightens. Around sixty per cent comes the inner point where ‘The Passive Becomes Active’: the character, who until now has endured, begins to act. This is the moment that reveals what they are made of, as pressure forces them to take a stand. A series of trials follows, exhausting their strength. At seventy-five per cent the story reaches the ‘Major Crisis’—the catastrophe in which both external confidence and inner certainty collapse. Here the question is no longer what the character will do, but why they continue at all.

Part Five – ‘Final Pressure’ (75–90%)
In this segment, action acquires definitive clarity. The character attempts to gather their scattered strength and make their final choice. Around eighty-five per cent comes the inner point of ‘A Little Help from an Old Friend’—a symbolic gesture of support that does not solve the problem but restores hope. At ninety per cent arrives the ‘Climax’—the moment when all lines intersect. The external struggle is resolved, but the true payoff is internal: the insight that gives meaning to everything that has been endured.

Finale – ‘Slow Curtain’ (90–100%)
After the climax comes the slow curtain—a brief release in which the idea of the story is revealed. Consequences, moral meaning, and transformation become clear. At one hundred per cent the final point is reached—the ‘Payoff’. Here the meaning of the initial Hook is revealed, the circle of meaning closes, and the viewer experiences catharsis—that ‘Aha!’ moment which purges fear and pity and restores a sense of order to the world.

This structure describes the double movement of every classical screenplay: external adventure and internal transformation. External turning points organise the action, while internal ones give it emotional depth. Their combination creates a sense of necessity—everything happens because it must, and every step leads toward new awareness. The ending does not merely close the story; it transforms experience into knowledge—for the character, for the viewer, and for life itself.

How to Write a Hollywood Script?

‘Structure is the key to success. It is the skeleton that holds the story together. All stories are variations of a few basic themes.’
– Syd Field

To write a screenplay for an American film is to make a sourdough starter: the new story is born from a previous, living story. It is not invented from nothing, but transmitted like a cultural gene,

like a living bacterium of meaning. One must choose the right starter – a film in which the structure works. Theme, language, culture, or characters may change, but the skeleton remains the same. Stories are the way people attempt to impose order on life, despite knowing that everything will one day disappear. They always have a beginning and an end, even when the end is concealed. If we do not allow characters to die, we turn them into zombies – meaningless figures moving by inertia. Every story has its own living cycle, and when it dies, it leaves behind a form that will be resurrected in a new narrative. American cinema is a master of precisely this: the rebirth of archetypes, rendered accessible and alive once more.

Steven Soderbergh's Erin Brockovich (2000) is an example of such a living starter. Its story is simple and can be told in a single sentence: a poor, uneducated woman with three children exposes a major corporation that is polluting the water. But beneath this surface lies a classical structure – incident, dilemma, overcoming, catharsis. At the beginning, Erin is poor, proud, and convinced that the world owes her something. An accident changes her life, but instead of money she receives refusal and humiliation. From this defeat emerges the decision to fight – to transform personal pain into action. This marks the beginning of the second phase: opportunity and risk. Erin finds a job at a law firm and stumbles upon a case that will change her life and the lives of others. This external goal – winning a lawsuit and earning money – is only the surface. The true story is internal: Erin's transformation from an angry person seeking retribution into a woman who understands that respect is not granted, but earned. Every act in the screenplay is a step towards this realisation. The car accident places her in the position of a victim. The job at the firm turns her into a participant in a system that does not respect the weak. The case against the corporation makes her a mediator between the world of the poor and the world of power. But the decisive transformation occurs when she realises that she cannot use others as means – neither her children, nor her colleagues, nor love itself.

The screenplay is built on a sequence of choices and consequences. Every action has a price and an outcome that leads to moral change. Erin is an active protagonist – she does not wait; she acts. Yet it is precisely her actions that reveal her flaws: pride, bluntness, mistrust. Her conflict with the lawyer, the breakup with her partner, the estrangement from her children – all these moments are necessary to reveal her inner journey. When she finally succeeds, the reward is not only material. The true victory is the capacity to respect others, even when the system sets them against one another. The Hollywood screenplay always operates on two levels: external desire and internal need. The external desire is visible – to win a case, a love, a battle, a prize. The internal need is invisible – to understand who you are and what it means to be a good human being. Success arrives when the protagonist recognises this second aim. At that point, the story closes its circle – not merely as plot, but as a moral formula. In the final moments of Erin Brockovich, the heroine receives recognition and money, but the true catharsis lies in the lawyer's line: 'Apparently nobody teaches models how to apologise.' It reverses the opening situation – the person who once did not know how to respect is now granted respect.

The American screenplay is constructed from clear actions, turning points, and choices, linked along the thread of desire. It follows the inner logic of life itself – birth, struggle, death, awareness. It does not matter whether the hero is a lawyer, an astronaut, or a single mother – the structure is the same. The audience responds not to the theme, but to the familiar form of human redemption. When the story reaches its end, silence falls – that particular silence which, as Sacha Guitry said of Mozart's music, also belongs to Mozart. This is how a Hollywood screenplay is written: not by inventing something new, but by reviving the eternal formula through which the human being learns, once again, how to be human.

How to Write a Script for a Bulgarian Film?

'Women are the guardians of life, and as outsiders to the structures of power that produce war, have a special responsibility to refuse its logic and methods.'
— Virginia Woolf

The Goat Horn (1972), directed by Metodi Andonov, is not merely the strongest Bulgarian film ever made; it is also the most precise textbook of dramaturgy—written in silence, light, and pain. Its story follows the ancient Aristotelian formula: equilibrium–incident–new equilibrium, or, in other words, order, destruction, and catharsis. The opening introduces a world of quiet labour, the mountainous balance of Karaivan and his family. When Ottoman soldiers rape and kill his wife, that balance is shattered and the narrative is set in motion. The incident is not simply a trigger for action but a moral axis: can evil be defeated through new evil?

The first act establishes this dilemma. Karaivan withdraws into the mountains with his daughter and raises her as a man, preparing her for revenge. From this moment on, the drama is driven by tension between two truths: the father's belief in blood vengeance and the daughter's future discovery of another path. By the seventeenth minute, the central question is already clear: is retribution the road back to peace?

The second act unfolds the spiral of action. Under her father's will, Maria finds and kills the attackers one by one. On the surface, the narrative resembles a classical revenge tragedy—a sequence of plans and executions. Beneath it, however, an inner transformation is taking place. With each killing, Maria loses a part of herself. When she meets a young shepherd, the midpoint arrives—the moment when the passive turns active and the heroine begins to choose for herself. Her love for the shepherd is the reversal that transforms mechanical vengeance into moral doubt. Here the story changes direction: the dilemma is no longer whether to avenge, but whether one can remain human after avenging.

The third act collides the two worlds. Karaivan, consumed by blind resolve, kills the shepherd in order to 'return' his daughter to her mission. In doing so, he violates the very idea of life. The climax comes when Maria chooses death alongside her beloved—an act that breaks the chain of violence. The victory is internal, not physical. The feminine principle refuses the logic of hatred and restores order through love and self-sacrifice. This is the film's true catharsis: the refusal to repeat evil. The ending mirrors the beginning, but with reversed meaning. Karaivan carries his daughter's body along the same mountain path on which he once carried his murdered wife. The symmetry is exact, yet its significance is transformed: the first carrying was a call for revenge; the second is an admission of guilt. By throwing stones into the abyss, Karaivan casts away his own delusion—the belief that he could turn a woman into a weapon. The real victory lies in the recognition that life cannot be restored through destruction. Structurally, the film is an example of near-mathematical precision. The introduction, inciting incident, dilemma, and climax align perfectly with the key turning points of the classical three-act structure. Yet this precision is not technical but organic. Every scene has an internal arc—beginning, escalation, reversal—and the sub-stories (training, killings, love) reinforce the central dilemma. Andonov directs with strict economy: dialogue is sparse, action speaks in place of words. The camera and silence express what language cannot.

The Goat Horn operates through double motivation—external and internal. The external motivation is the goal of revenge, which sustains narrative momentum. The internal motivation is the search for meaning, which leads to catharsis. These lines meet in the theme: violence breeds violence, while love breaks the cycle. In this confrontation between the masculine and the feminine, between order and chaos, the film finds its truth. When the classical structure is laid over The Goat Horn, the minute-by-minute correspondences are not a trick but evidence of an

intuitively mastered form. Three acts, a clear dilemma, a midpoint, a climax, and a moral consequence—this is the skeleton. The flesh is in the gazes, the silences, and the mountain stillness.

The screenplay does not follow a formula; it turns form into a vessel for truth. And precisely here lies the answer to the question of how to write a screenplay for the greatest Bulgarian film: by finding the rhythm in which human beings, nature, and pain speak the same language.

What Is Scriptwriting?

'Writing is rewriting.'
— Ernest Hemingway

Screenwriting craft is the art of thinking through images, movement, and sound, of structuring time so that a story becomes an experience. It combines literary sensitivity with engineering precision, because the screenplay is simultaneously text and blueprint, art and craft. At its core lies the act of writing for the screen—for something that is meant to be seen, performed, and felt. The screenwriter creates a world and characters, builds dramatic situations, arranges scenes and dialogue, while always thinking about how words will transform into images. In practice there are two main paths: writing original screenplays and writing on commission or adapting existing material. In the first case the author proposes an original idea, seeking to sell it or place it under option; in the second, the writer works with a pre-existing source—a novel, article, format, documentary material, or true story. In both cases the screenplay is a living document, constantly evolving through notes, discussions, and rewrites. In the film industry it is common for different writers to work on the same story, each adding a new layer—structure, dialogue, rhythm, or detail. The speculative screenplay, written without commission, serves as a demonstration of voice and style; it introduces the writer to the industry, but can also function as a product in its own right. The commissioned screenplay, by contrast, is the result of being hired by a studio or producer to develop a specific idea. In both cases, craft is measured by the ability to build a story that engages both on the page and on the screen. In television, screenwriting is a collective process: teams of writers work together in a shared room, breaking story arcs, maintaining tone, and protecting the world of the series. In games and interactive formats, writers construct branching narratives in which the player's choices generate new paths and drama unfolds according to the logic of interaction.

Structure is the heart of screenwriting craft. It sets the pulse of the action and controls escalation and payoff. From the classical three-act design of setup, confrontation, and resolution to newer four-act and alternative models, structure is a tool, not a dogma. What matters is that every action has a cause-and-effect relationship and emotional meaning. As Aristotle teaches, plot is the arrangement of events that produces catharsis; for Robert McKee it is the strategic ordering of events that change the lives of the characters. In a good screenplay rhythm and tension are felt even while reading—the scenes follow one another with a sense of necessity, page after page. Characters are the engine of this structure. They are defined not by what they say, but by what they want and what they fear. External goals drive the action, while internal needs give it depth. Conflict—the collision between the two—generates drama. Dialogue, when well written, does not merely transmit information but reveals character and tension. The camera shows the truth, but words foreshadow it; scenes are written to be watched, not simply read. The form of the screenplay is both technical and poetic. It is written in the present tense, concise and clear, focusing on what can be seen and heard. The master-scene format imposes a strict order: scene

heading with place and time, description of action, character names, and dialogue. Transitions such as ‘cut to’ or ‘fade in’ are kept to a minimum, since editing is implied. This economy creates rhythm and transparency: every word has weight, every sentence directs the camera through imagination.
Screenwriting craft is also the ability to work within a team. The screenwriter communicates with directors, producers, actors, editors—each reading the text through the lens of their own profession. For this reason the screenplay must be both inspiring and clear, poetic and practical. It is the first complete translation of an idea, the reference point for all subsequent work. Historically, screenwriting has evolved from sketches and continuities into a modern literary form. From an instrument of industrial control it has become a space for authorial expression. In the era of streaming and digital platforms, the screenwriter no longer delivers a single story but builds entire universes—narratives that unfold across episodes, seasons, and formats. Screenwriting craft is the art of balance: between structure and freedom, between intention and execution, between control and inspiration. It unites the rationality of the architect with the sensitivity of the poet. At its best, the screenplay is the invisible score of cinema—a text that evaporates the moment it comes alive on screen, yet leaves behind rhythm, image, and emotion that continue to resonate long after the final credits.

2.3. The Art of Scriptwriting

What Is A Screenplay?

‘The script is not the film. It’s a blueprint that leads to it. The script is the architecture of the finished work.’
— David Lynch

A screenplay[37] is that invisible architecture which transforms the chaos of imagination into an order of events. It is a bridge between idea and action, between the impulse to tell and the necessity to arrange. The origin of the word—from the Italian scenario, ‘that which is fixed to the stage’—suggests something at once fragile and foundational: a frame that holds the performance without suffocating it. In its earliest meaning the screenplay was precisely this—a synopsis, a supporting scheme, a sketch that allowed action to unfold. In Renaissance Italy the actors of commedia dell’arte relied on brief notes known as canovaccio—a list of scenes, gestures, and situations pinned backstage. These outlines were not a ‘text’ but a navigational map. The performers improvised, yet within clear boundaries. The screenplay functioned as both order and freedom: a constraint that ensured the collective action would not collapse, and a permission for creativity that kept the stage alive. Already here appears the duality that will accompany the form for centuries—the tension between control and inspiration.
With the rise of opera and ballet, the scenario became a planning instrument. Before music or verse appeared, the dramatic flow was organised in a concise sketch describing what would happen, to whom, and in what sequence. This preliminary structure served both artistic vision and organisational logistics; it was the first ‘producer’s document’. Thus the screenplay acquired

[37] Mehring, Margaret. (1990) The Screenplay: A Blend of Film Form and Content. Boston: Focal Press.

a double status: a creative act and a managerial plan. When cinema emerged at the end of the nineteenth century, the screenplay was born again. Early films did not tell stories; they were spectacles—a train arriving at a station, workers leaving a factory. Gradually, the need for continuity compelled directors to prepare notes—brief descriptions of actions to be filmed. At first these consisted of only a few lines, but as films grew longer and more complex, the demand for a detailed structure became unavoidable. The screenplay thus emerged as an instrument of visual thinking—a document that anticipates the course of the story before the camera begins to shoot.

At the beginning of the twentieth century the screenplay became an industrial standard. The system introduced by Thomas Harper Ince[38] transformed it into a managerial document detailing every scene, every intertitle, even the calculation of costs. This model subordinated creativity to the factory logic of Hollywood. The screenwriter was no longer merely a storyteller, but a coordinator, an architect of production. The screenplay became not just a literary text but a mechanism of control. At the same time, this very control enabled a new artistic precision in film.

Europe responded differently. In contrast to the American continuity system stood the poetic screenplay[39] of Carl Mayer—written like a musical score, privileging rhythm and emotion over technical instruction. His texts demonstrated that the screenplay could also be literature—an autonomous form that thinks in visions and sensations, without reducing itself to a production plan. Between these two approaches—the industrial and the poetic—emerges the central tension that defines the history of screenwriting thought: is the screenplay an instrument for creating art, or a means of domesticating it. This duality has not disappeared. In every television report, documentary film, or podcast there exists an invisible screenplay—an order that arranges sounds, images, and gestures. Even when a format presents itself as spontaneous, it follows a prior design. Journalists and directors arrange facts so they appear natural, just as Renaissance actors improvised within the limits of their canovaccio. Contemporary ‘media scripts’—political debates, television reality formats, viral clips—likewise seek to impose a structured narrative upon reality, making contingency resemble plot.

To ask what a screenplay is means to ask how humans cope with chaos through ordering. A screenplay is not merely a technical document or a literary sketch; it is an act of conscious structuring of experience. Whether written for theatre, cinema, radio, or media platforms, it serves the same function: to create an order that can be lived through. In it, imagination is anchored to the stage of reality, and reality is transformed into a space of possibility. From the improvisations of commedia dell’arte to digital media forms, the screenplay remains the quiet mediator between inspiration and organisation. It is both map and contract, both promise and framework—that chaos can be told, that an idea can become visible, and that behind every performance, no matter how spontaneous it appears, there exists somewhere a carefully ordered page to which the architecture of human imagination is fixed.

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[38] Maras, Steven. Screenwriting: History, Theory and Practice. NY: Wallflower, 2009.

[39] Raynauld, Isabelle. “Screenwriting” in The Encyclopedia of Early Cinema. Edited by Abel, Richard. NY: Routledge, 2005.

Standardisation of the Screenplay

'Modern media turn culture into an assembly line of entertainment, where narrative form shapes consciousness.'
— Neil Postman

After the collapse of the studio system and the emergence of 'New Hollywood', the screenplay[40] gradually shifted from a disciplined production blueprint to a more literary document whose task was to capture dramatic essence without dictating the camera. The old continuity format—a detailed sequence of shots, intertitles, and technical instructions—served the factory logic of early cinema: predictability, cost control, and production precision. When the 1948 case United States v. Paramount Pictures dismantled vertical monopoly and studios lost direct control over cinemas, the screenplay also lost its function as a managerial instrument. In the new model, independent producers assembled projects, directors sought financing, actors chose roles based on 'readability', and studios largely became distributors. The screenplay thus began a new life: no longer a factory plan, it became a document of persuasion—a text designed to 'project a film' in the reader's mind. At the same time, an aesthetic reconfiguration took place. The idea of the director as author shifted the centre of gravity from 'how it is shot' to 'what is being told'. The master-scene format proved ideal for this new sensibility: the screenwriter delivers dramatic material—situation, action, goal, obstacle, reversal—while the director shapes the visual language. The text no longer commands the camera but proposes a dramaturgical vision. In this new freedom, the language of the screenplay becomes more elastic, descriptions more economical, dialogue more structured. The gradual evolution from scenario to continuity to screenplay marks the birth of a previously unknown form: a document that does not merely describe a future film but simulates its tempo, rhythm, and emotional intensity. Technological progress further encouraged standardisation. Longer productions, sound, denser sets, and complex editing demanded clarity, economy, and predictability. 'One page equals one minute' became an industrial law. Present tense concentrates action, the restriction to the visible protects cinematic thinking from literary ornamentation, and scene headings organise the narrative as a functional skeleton. Thus the screenplay acquires a dual nature: literature for reading and an instrument of production. It begins its life as a pitch, becomes the basis for directorial decisions, and finally serves as a guide in editing. In this process power is redistributed—the writer generates dramatic energy, the director translates it into images, and studio rhythm ensures efficiency. Standardisation, however, does not unify styles. Some screenplays are telegraphic, others approach poetry. What they share is discipline: a clear goal for every scene, a change in value at each moment, visible character motivation. Form here is not bureaucracy but an ethics of readability, care for every subsequent participant in the chain. It is precisely this discipline that enables the Hollywood model to spread outward: films begin to be conceived as finished products, and screenplays as instructions for experience.

And here the real transition begins: the Hollywood narrative standard becomes a global model not only for cinema but for television and the internet. When television series enter their golden age, they adopt cinematic screenplay structures almost mechanically—a hook in the opening minutes, an inciting incident around the tenth, a midpoint reversal, a final turn leading into the next episode. This formula becomes an algorithm for retaining attention. Dramaturgical rhetoric begins to govern not only artworks but news flows, political campaigns, reality formats, and advertising. With the rise of the internet, the original aim—creating a good story—is gradually

[40] Boon, Kevin Alexander. Script Culture and the American Screenplay. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2008.

replaced by a new logic: the production of engagement. Platform videos follow the same ‘proven’ schemes: rapid hook, mini-incident, accelerated conflict, promise of continuation. TikTok, vlogs, and reels do not create dramaturgy; they exploit it as a mechanism. Thus a standard born as an artistic tool for controlling the film process becomes a system for controlling attention. What once was a form of art gradually turns into a matrix of mass communication—a predictable model through which audiences do not simply watch stories but are governed by their rhythm.

The contemporary world inherits not the beauty of Hollywood structure but its functionality. Screenplay formulas designed to sustain cinematic aesthetics now serve the attention industry—television, news dramatization, influencer scripts, advertising, political strategy. Artistic standardisation thus becomes social standardisation: the way stories are told becomes the way thinking itself is organised. And the form that was once an instrument of art slowly transforms into an algorithm of mass control.

How Can a Scriptwriter Remain a Devoted Seeker of Truth?

‘Journalism is the first rough draft of history.’
— Philip L. Graham

The transition from journalism to screenwriting is not a betrayal of truth but its rebirth in a new language. A journalist who turns toward cinema does not abandon the principles of verification and integrity; rather, they carry them into a world where facts come alive through action, emotion, and moral depth. Truth remains the core, but its form changes: from document to experience, from testimony to drama. This transformation is not a deception but a continuation—an attempt to tell the same story that has always driven journalism, now spoken in the language of images. Both the journalist and the screenwriter begin from the same human impulse: the desire to understand the world. The former arranges facts; the latter unfolds their human consequences. The journalist asks, ‘What happened and why does it matter?’ The screenwriter asks, ‘What did it cost, and how was it lived?’ While journalism seeks verifiable accuracy, screenwriting pursues an inner, dramatic truth—one that cannot be proven by documents but can be felt. When an author masters both approaches, they create stories that illuminate reality without embellishing it, and bring it closer to the audience without diminishing it.

Truth, seen through the journalist’s lens, is factual and concrete. Truth sought by the screenwriter is emotional and moral. The first rests on evidence; the second on empathy. There is no opposition between them, only complementarity: fact grounds feeling, and feeling gives fact meaning. A film born of journalistic rigor can reveal not only what happened, but why it matters to us. Truth conveyed through human destinies lingers longer in memory than any statistic. The journalist who writes a screenplay does not renounce their methods. They continue to research, verify, and listen. The difference is that instead of describing, they begin to show. The interview becomes a scene, the quotation a dialogue, the observation an action. Facts cease to be mere information and become lived experience. Truth is no longer demonstrated; it is felt. This is the art of transition: to carry verified reality into a world where a glance, a silence, or a gesture can say more than a thousand words.

The greatest challenge for the journalist entering cinema is to preserve fidelity to reality without sacrificing dramatic power. To adapt events means compressing timelines, merging characters, and finding symbolic actions that concentrate the essence of the facts. Truth lies not in detail but in meaning. When artistic invention serves clarification, it remains faithful; when it serves

spectacle, it betrays. To remain a devotee of truth is to choose the former—to tell stories in order to illuminate, not merely to impress. The journalist-screenwriter remains an investigator, but now of human motives. Their camera may be poetic, but their conscience is unchanged. They know the audience will believe them only if they sense their honesty. In a screenplay, integrity is expressed not through footnotes but through humanity—through the way suffering, guilt, or hope are portrayed. Ethical responsibility remains the same: not to harm, not to humiliate, not to exploit human experience as an effect. Trust is built not only on accuracy but on compassion. A film written by a journalist often feels more truthful because it carries the weight of real observation. The reporter knows how the street looks, how dust smells, how a witness's voice sounds. These concrete details, transferred to the screen, create an authenticity that cannot be fabricated. The writer does not invent the world but assembles it from memories and facts, from faces and voices. Thus journalistic precision becomes a source of artistic realism.

One of the most difficult tasks in cinema is to unite emotion with discipline, imagination with responsibility. The journalist already possesses the latter; cinema compels them to discover the former. This encounter is not a conflict but an opportunity for a new kind of storytelling—at once engaged and contemplative, emotional and faithful. Ultimately, the move from reportage to screenplay is not a change of profession but a continuation of the same mission: to reveal human truth in a world that constantly conceals it with noise. To remain a devoted seeker of truth when writing for cinema is to understand that truth has more than one face. It is both fact and feeling, document and experience, reality and meaning. Journalism captures the moment; screenwriting gives it life. The journalist investigates in order to show; the screenwriter investigates in order to understand. And when these two perspectives meet, what emerges is not merely a film, but a testimony—an act of fidelity to truth, expressed not in ink, but in light.

The Fiction of Documentary Cinema

'Documentary is the creative treatment of actuality.'
— John Grierson

'The fiction of documentary cinema' is a term[41] John Grierson used in 1926 to designate a new art form – cinema that does not invent but 'observes life'. In a review for the New York Sun and later in his book First Principles of Documentary (1932), he formulated the foundational principles of documentary as the possibility of seeing reality not through the fiction of characters and plot, but through the drama of actuality itself. From this perspective emerges the idea that the director and the screenwriter do not create a world but capture it – and that this very act of capture constitutes a form of authorship. According to Grierson, cinema can operate in three worlds: as a mirror reflection of reality, as a wholly imaginary world, and as a narrative that exists outside time and place. Between these three fields – the real, the imaginary, and the narrative – documentary cinema arises, dramatizing reality without inventing it. It seeks to show life 'as it is', yet through a careful staging of events that transforms observation into story.

Grierson understood documentary cinema as a moral philosophy of images and an instrument for educating society. For him, film does not merely show; it clarifies. It translates the complexity of the world into the language of everyday experience. Documentary, he argued, could counter propaganda and 'yellow journalism' by cultivating visual literacy among citizens. Film becomes

[41] Grierson, J. (1932) First Principles of Documentary. London: GPO Film Unit.

a means of social reform, a way of revitalising democracy through informed perception. Through the ‘dramatization of reality’, citizens are able to see social processes as human stories, to grasp the values embedded in every decision and the consequences that follow. In this sense, the direction of documentary events is not manipulation but pedagogy – a way of conveying meaning through form. Lenin’s influence on Grierson is evident. Both regarded film as an instrument of collective enlightenment and social mobilisation. In the 1920s, Grierson organised screenings of Battleship Potemkin in the United States, viewing it not as a revolutionary work but as a social lesson – a warning about what happens when a society fails to recognise its own problems. During this period, government bodies such as the Empire Marketing Board were established, aiming to promote the British way of life through film chronicles. Thus emerged the first films that did not merely record but dramatise the labour of miners, sailors, or postal workers. From here begins the modern television news format – a genre that combines real images with a directed narrative to produce a sense of authenticity.

Documentary cinema is the foundation of visual journalism. Its script is not fiction but a logic of observation – a sequence of shots that constructs trust. The director must create the feeling that the viewer is ‘present’ at events, even though these events are planned and structured in advance. In this sense, every documentary scene is a compromise between spontaneity and composition, between reality and its ordered form. This balance turns documentary cinema into a source of news and a model for television reportage: truth must appear as if it is unfolding before our eyes. According to Grierson, cinema has no need of hidden symbols or archetypes; it operates through the immediacy of the image. Audiences believe what they see. For this reason, documentary cinema stands closer to propaganda than to fiction: both work through repetition and suggestion. When viewers see violence, they perceive it literally; when they see corruption, they begin to recognise it in reality. In this sense, the documentary film does not merely describe the world; it recreates it within the viewer’s consciousness.

The idea of the ‘fiction of the documentary’ reveals that every representation of reality is already an interpretation. Even the most neutral camera chooses a viewpoint, a moment, an angle, a montage. Every repetition of an image becomes an act of persuasion. This is what links documentary cinema to television news, where fact is arranged in dramatic form in order to become a story. The perception of these images as real events is the result of direction – of a carefully constructed illusion of presence. The documentary script is therefore a double act: both a record of reality and its dramatization. From this contradiction its power emerges. Cinema that presents itself as ‘true’ is always partially fictional, because the very act of showing is a choice. And yet it is precisely this choice that makes the film convincing. In this way, documentary cinema becomes not merely a mirror of the world, but the foundation of modern media culture, in which every truth must be staged in order to be believed.

The Narrative of Journalism

‘Objectivity is not the absence of a point of view; it is the discipline of verification. The reporter must observe like a camera, but never without a human heart.’
— Tom Wolfe

The shift from classical reportage to subjective storytelling did not occur suddenly. It developed gradually, from the experiments of New Journalism in the 1960s to today’s era of podcasts, documentary series, and algorithmic news. What unites all these forms is that audiences no longer seek facts alone, but experience. As trust in institutions declines, the intimacy of

narrative—whether neutral or stylised—offers refuge. Journalism thus finds itself competing for attention with genres born in literature.

New Journalism introduced a radical change in the reporter's posture. The journalist no longer remains invisible behind the text, but appears within it—participating, experiencing, narrating in the first person. Scenes replace dry summaries, dialogue displaces quotation, and everyday details—clothing, gestures, rooms—build atmosphere more powerfully than statistics. Truth becomes experience rather than merely a verified fact. This change in perspective brings journalism closer to the novel: it seeks emotional credibility, not only documentary accuracy. Critics accuse it of blurring the boundaries between reportage and fiction, but its defenders argue that immersion in reality produces a deeper form of accuracy, because it reduces speculation and distance. Over the following decades, the narrative approach spread across all media. Long-form reports and profiles began to read like documentary novellas; television adopted slower rhythms and the expressive power of silence; even short news items started to be constructed as scenes with human faces. The first person ceased to be taboo. Authors now show what they know and how they know it—a sign of transparency rather than subjective weakness. This responds to a social demand for voices with faces and doubt, rather than disembodied objectivity.

The digital environment accelerated the process. Algorithms reward emotional content; headlines became mini-narratives; podcasts restored the intimacy of the voice; streaming platforms turned real events into multi-season dramas. News no longer competes only with other news, but with fictional worlds that offer deeper understanding through empathy. Audiences do not simply want to know what happened; they want to feel what it was like to live through it. This shift brought journalism and novelistic truth closer together. The first rests on verified facts; the second on psychological and moral credibility. The contemporary storyteller strives for both. The task is to combine factual precision with dramatic force without crossing into invention. This demands a new ethics of transparency: clear marking of reconstructions, openness about methods, explicit acknowledgment of limits. When this discipline is respected, narrative enlightens; when it is lost, it becomes manipulation.

The reason fiction appears to 'prevail' is not only aesthetic, but existential. The major issues of our time—climate crisis, inequality, the erosion of democratic models—are too slow, abstract, and dispersed for traditional news formats. The novel and narrative documentary can reveal these processes through individual lives: crisis as personal drama, politics as family dilemma, statistics as human fate. In an age of scepticism, people trust the concrete, the face and the voice, rather than the institution. Economic changes further intensify this displacement. Shrinking newsroom resources limit long investigations, while publishing, podcasts, and streaming provide time and funding for slow, complex stories. The market favours formats that can migrate across media—books, screenplays, audio and visual forms—all of which follow the logic of the novel: world-building, characters, and moral choice. Yet journalism has not lost the battle; it has merely changed the terrain. Today's audience expects not distance but honesty; not objectivity but an open method; not authority but empathy. Readers have become active co-investigators—they verify, comment, redistribute. For this reason, the strongest journalistic forms today combine the transparency of science with the depth of the novel. Truth is achieved not through detachment, but through a clearly visible process of understanding. Fiction prevails because it knows how to translate fact into feeling, and journalism increasingly adopts this language in order to remain intelligible. The two are no longer adversaries, but interdependent fields. Literary thinking helps journalism become more human, while journalistic verification protects narrative from arbitrariness. The victory of fiction lies not in invention, but in influence: it demonstrated that understanding the world requires not only evidence, but imagination.

Creative and Immersive Journalism

'Facts do not speak for themselves; they speak only when someone knows how to interpret them. Journalism is storytelling with a purpose.'
— Walter Lippmann

Creative journalism, also known as literary or narrative nonfiction, has become one of the most significant currents in the contemporary media landscape. It moves beyond the limits of traditional reporting by combining factual accuracy with the expressive power of storytelling. In this form, the journalist does not merely inform but creates an experience, translating reality through a human voice, rhythm and emotion. This approach does not replace truth; it makes it tangible. Facts become scenes, data turn into human stories, and the distance between reader and event dissolves. At its core, creative journalism remains committed to factual integrity. It employs literary techniques—scene, dialogue, interior reflection, sensory description—without allowing invention. The author is free in style, but not in substance. The narrative is built on real events, thoroughly researched and shaped with aesthetic care. The aim is balance: between documentation and poetry, between precision and suggestion. This form acknowledges that objectivity is not achieved through a neutral tone, but through transparency and honesty, when the reader understands not only what happened, but how the reporter arrived at that understanding.

The rise of narrative journalism is part of a broader cultural shift. Society no longer finds satisfaction in news alone; it seeks stories. In a world saturated with information, people trust narrative more than statistics. Creative journalism responds to this need by transforming dry data into narratives that bind individual facts into human meaning. It fills the gap between objective reporting and subjective experience, restoring the lost emotional connection between media and audience. In the digital age, this form acquires new dimensions. Online platforms allow the integration of text, sound and image, creating multisensory impact. Long-form pieces, podcasts and visual essays expand classical journalistic genres. Narrative rhythm is no longer dictated by the printed page, but by the screen and the economy of attention. This requires from journalists not only literary skill, but also an understanding of montage, sound and composition—a new kind of multimedia literacy.

Alongside creative journalism, immersive journalism has developed as a related but distinct approach, one that replaces distance with participation. Here the reporter is not an external observer but an active presence within the environment being explored. Truth is achieved not through detachment, but through lived experience. Immersion requires time, presence and openness. The journalist lives among the people they write about, shares their daily routines, and views the world through their eyes. The result is not simply a report, but an experience that captures the invisible contexts of human behaviour—fear, hope, dignity, guilt. This practice reshapes the very idea of credibility. Immersive journalism does not claim neutrality, but authenticity. It acknowledges the author's presence as part of the story and transforms subjectivity into a tool for truth. The public role of the reporter changes accordingly: no longer a neutral intermediary, but a participant in the process of understanding. This form can restore trust in journalism precisely because it does not present an omniscient voice, but a vulnerable human being searching for meaning alongside the reader. At the same time, the approach carries risks. Immersion can erode critical distance. Excessive empathy may blur facts or turn the journalist into the story rather than its interpreter. Moreover, immersive work is slow and costly, requiring time, resources and institutional support that are often absent in today's media economy. Yet despite these limits, it remains a counterforce to fast, superficial and algorithm-driven information flows.

Together, creative and immersive journalism define a new paradigm: journalism as experience. They reject the impersonal tone of conventional news and restore the human voice to the media. Through them, the reporter becomes a storyteller and the audience a participant. Truth is no longer only what can be proven, but what can be felt and understood. In this perspective, journalism approaches art: it does not merely show the world, but explains it, lives through it, and reshapes it. Current trends suggest that the future of journalism will belong not to speed, but to depth. Attention has become the scarce resource, and emotional trust the new currency. Creative and immersive forms offer media a chance to reclaim their public role by replacing informational overload with human truth. In a world where everything is visible but little is comprehensible, these approaches offer what matters most—not the news itself, but meaning.

Docudrama and Mockumentary

'Cinema verité confuses fact and truth. Facts create norms; truth illuminates. Cinema is a lie that makes us realize the truth.'
— Werner Herzog

Cinema has always been obsessed with the boundary between truth and fiction. Among the most intriguing forms that blur this boundary are docufiction, the docudrama and the mockumentary—three hybrid genres in which reality and narrative exchange roles. They demonstrate that the camera is not merely a tool for recording the world, but a means of interpreting, reproducing and sometimes inventing it. Docufiction, or documentary fiction, is perhaps the most flexible of these forms. It originates in documentary cinema but incorporates staged or improvised scenes designed to reveal life more truthfully than pure observation alone. Real people often appear as themselves or as versions of their own lives, while the director combines the accidental with the directed. The aim is not to replace reality, but to capture the authentic moment when reality and its representation coincide. In this process, the filmmaker becomes a co-author of life, and life becomes a co-author of the film. The form expresses a deeper truth: every act of observation alters what is observed. Once the camera appears, reality is already 'staged'. People begin to perform, whether they are conscious of it or not. Docufiction does not conceal this effect; it exposes it. It does not claim pure objectivity, but examines how the act of filming itself reshapes events. In the age of social media, where life is increasingly 'directed' for the camera, this form feels particularly contemporary: documentary and fiction intertwine because reality itself is now experienced as a stage.

The docudrama occupies a different position, turning instead towards the past. It is a cinematic form that reconstructs real events through actors, dialogue and dramatized scenes. Docudrama arises from the desire to tell the truth through experience rather than through facts alone. It combines the journalistic pursuit of accuracy with the dramaturgical pursuit of emotional power. In this genre, fact becomes drama and history becomes a moral experience. The viewer does not merely learn what happened, but senses what it was like to live through it. In recent decades, docudrama has grown in prominence, particularly on television and streaming platforms, where real political, legal and social events are transformed into series. The format responds to a need not simply to consume news, but to understand it deeply. Truth is no longer just a datum, but a process of empathy. At the same time, docudrama demands a careful balance between precision and artistry. Excessive fidelity can drain a story of vitality, while excessive dramatization can undermine credibility. The ethical question remains unresolved: how far can reality be reconstructed before it becomes fiction?

The mockumentary does the reverse. It uses the language of documentary to tell an invented story. Its name derives from the English mock and documentary. This form presents itself as a documentary film, but is in fact a parody of documentary conventions. Interviews, shaky cameras, archival footage, serious narration—all appear authentic, while the content itself is deliberately absurd. The mockumentary relies on the audience's familiarity with documentary language and its willingness to laugh at its claims to objectivity. It functions simultaneously as satire and commentary, not only on society, but on the media themselves. In contemporary culture, the mockumentary becomes a critique of media credibility. It reveals how easily viewers can believe something simply because it looks as if it has been filmed 'like a documentary'. In a world where disinformation circulates through the same visual codes as news, the mockumentary acquires an almost political role. It exposes the power of form to generate trust even in the absence of truth.

What unites these three genres is an awareness that screen reality is always constructed. Film can never simply show the world; it inevitably edits it. Docufiction explores this editing as a process of co-creation between camera and life. Docudrama uses it to resurrect the past and endow it with human meaning. The mockumentary exposes it by pretending to be documentary in order to show how easily form can deceive perception. Today, these hybrid forms evolve in step with cultural uncertainty about truth and interpretation. They reflect a world in which everyone carries a camera, everyone produces content, and the boundary between testimony and spectacle dissolves. Docudrama cultivates empathy, docufiction generates a sense of authenticity, and the mockumentary protects us from naivety. Their success rests on a profound insight: truth is no longer located solely in documents, but in the ways society narrates them. In this space, cinema is no longer a mirror of reality, but its continuation—a mode of thinking that uses fiction to reach deeper layers of truth. Hybrid genres such as docufiction, docudrama and mockumentary become experiments in trust between viewer and image. They ask not only 'what is truth', but 'how do we recognise it when we see it'. Their power is not merely aesthetic, but philosophical. They explore the very nature of seeing in a society where every event exists simultaneously as fact and as media representation. Ultimately, these three genres outline different ways of engaging with reality. Docufiction invites us to participate in the present, docudrama allows us to relive the past, and the mockumentary teaches us to doubt the act of viewing itself. They meet at the point where media and art share a common aim: to encourage critical reflection on what we take for granted. In a world where the real and the invented exchange places daily across social platforms, these genres offer not escape, but awareness. They remind us that truth is not simply what can be filmed, but what one has the courage to recognise.

Screenplays for Role-Playing Games

'A screenplay is life with the boring and meaningless parts removed.'
— Alfred Hitchcock

Media are moving away from the classical screenplay with fixed dialogue toward an interactive model in which the viewer becomes a participant. The story is no longer merely told but lived through choices and consequences. In this sense, the media script begins to resemble a role-playing game, grounded in moral decisions rather than memorised text. A film screenplay is written to be watched; a role-playing game script is written to be lived. This is the fundamental and decisive difference. In cinema, the viewer follows an already ordered story; in games, the player becomes its co-author. Decisions, actions and omissions reshape the plot. Cinema seeks

catharsis through identification; games seek it through responsibility. In one case, a person empathises with a character; in the other, the person becomes the character, choosing, erring and living with the consequences.

The film screenplay is linear. It follows a clear arc—beginning, middle and end, turning points and climax. Good cinema relies on controlled dynamics, where the director determines rhythm and the viewer submits to the time of the story. In games, time is interactive. It pauses, branches and changes direction according to the player's actions. The story is not 'told' but 'unfolded'. Its structure is not a line but a network of choices, a script of possibilities. Every choice carries moral weight, because it determines how the world responds. While in film the character's decision is fixed, in games the decision belongs to the player, and every 'if' must have a consequence. This interactivity alters the very meaning of action. In cinema, 'show, don't tell' is the rule: the viewer observes behaviour and infers meaning. In games, 'show' means 'allow to do'. Characters act through dialogue options, choices, thinking and movement; every action is a verb within the system. Menus, silence, even refusal to act become part of the narrative. The writer does not simply write dialogue but designs a moral grammar—a network of actions that express values.

A film screenplay withholds information because tension arises from surprise. A game script does the opposite. It reveals enough to allow the player to make informed choices. Tension comes not from what is unknown but from what must be decided. In a film, one cannot prevent tragedy; in a game, one may cause it or avoid it. This difference makes interactive writing inherently ethical. The writer does not merely invent events but models responsibility. Structurally, film scripts aim for economy. Every scene must advance the plot; everything unnecessary is cut. Games, by contrast, require spaces for reflection, exploration and changes of mind. Long scenes and branching dialogues do not slow the action but enrich it, allowing the player to know the world, test limits and recognise motives. True dynamism lies not in speed but in choice.

Formally, the differences run even deeper. Film screenplays follow the standard Master Scene format—scene heading, action, dialogue, transition. Game scripts must encode logic, states and variables: 'if the character is dead', 'if the player has confessed', '+10 trust with partner'. The text must be readable simultaneously by actors, designers and programmers. A single line may contain dialogue, instruction and condition. The game writer does not write only a story but a functional document that links teams. This system-based approach requires different tools. While film writers work in Final Draft or Fade In, game writers use platforms such as Twine, Articy or internal studio systems, where the story appears as a graph of nodes. Each node contains a scene, choices and consequences; each choice opens a new path. The writer is also a designer—an architect of experience who anticipates reactions, marks changes in the world and maintains narrative coherence as it branches.

Film produces catharsis; games produce conscience. In cinema, the viewer experiences another's drama and is purified through empathy. In games, the player experiences personal guilt, hope or pride and is changed by the consequences of their own decisions. Emotion arises not from a scripted twist but from the mirror the system holds up to the player. The film writer thinks in terms of composition, rhythm and image. The game writer thinks in terms of choice, mechanics and moral dynamics. The former conducts the viewer's feelings; the latter gives the tools to experience them directly. In one case, the camera looks; in the other, the world responds. Ultimately, both arts share a single aim: to create meaningful experience. Yet while film offers a finished form, games offer co-creation. Film invites empathy; games invite complicity. In one case, the story closes with the word 'End'. In the other, it continues to live in the decisions the player has made—decisions that can no longer be undone.

What Should Journalists Know About Scriptwriting?

'Don't tell me the moon is shining; show me the glint of light on broken glass.'
— Anton Chekhov

Journalism and screenwriting share a common core – the need to tell stories – but they differ in the way they do so. The journalist works with facts, social meanings and context, while the screenwriter operates with emotions, characters and visual actions that construct an experience unfolding in time. For the journalist entering the world of cinema, the challenge is not learning how to tell a story, but learning how to translate truth into the language of images. Truth remains the guiding principle, but its form changes: it moves from the factual to the dramatic, from the documentary to the human, from statement to action.

The fundamental difference between the two professions lies in perspective. Journalism describes society from the outside; cinema explores it from within. The reporter asks 'What happened and why does it matter?', the screenwriter asks 'To whom did it happen, what did it cost them, and how did it feel?'. Where journalism analyses, the screenplay makes one live through events. While the article unfolds context through words, film conveys it through action, framing and silence. A glance, a gesture, or the rhythm of editing can carry a meaning no paragraph can contain. Factual truth and artistic truth are not enemies. They collaborate: facts provide credibility, drama provides humanity. When adapting reality, the journalist must compress, merge and rearrange events, but without distorting their meaning. The real criterion is simple: every invention either clarifies the truth or obscures it. If it clarifies, it serves the viewer; if it obscures, it serves effect. Here lies the greatest challenge – finding the balance between fact and feeling, between document and destiny. Cinema does not tolerate explanations. In journalism one can pause and clarify; on screen time does not wait. Paragraphs of background must become actions. A short scene, a single gesture, a moment of silence can express more than a page of text. People reveal themselves through behaviour, not through self-explanation. Dialogue must move the scene forward, create tension and change, rather than repeat what is already known. The screenplay has a strict architecture, which becomes a new form of editing. Most films follow a three-part structure: an introduction with conflict and stakes, a development with rising tension, and a finale that brings transformation. This is not a mechanical formula but the rhythm of human experience. A journalist's sense of composition is invaluable: knowing how to guide an audience through information must now be translated into images rather than words. The scene becomes the new paragraph; action becomes the new argument.

The format of the screenplay is not a technical detail but part of the narrative itself. It must be clear, economical and visual. Each page corresponds roughly to one minute of screen time, which means every line carries weight. Action is written in the present tense and includes only what the viewer can see or hear. Dialogue is concise, sharp and rhythmic. The concision learned in the newsroom becomes here a condition for the screenplay's survival. A screenplay exists in three versions – on the page, on the set, and in the editing room. While an article ends with editorial approval, a screenplay is constantly rewritten. Directors, actors and circumstances add new shades. This is not a loss of control but the natural path of cinema as a collaborative art, where authorship expands rather than diminishes. Journalists are required to show the same resilience and humility they have towards editorial changes: to defend meaning while accepting other perspectives. Ethics remain central. In journalism, trust comes from verifiability; in cinema, from the honesty of intention. Even when a story is fictional, it must originate from the same source – respect for truth. Sensationalism is the easy route; true strength lies in human dignity. If

a source must be protected in a report, film can protect it through imagery without violating reality. Truth has many faces, but the moral responsibility of the storyteller remains singular. Journalists possess a distinct advantage: investigative instinct, attention to detail and the ability to construct logical order. These qualities become the foundation for convincing characters and credible worlds. Reportorial observation is the best antidote to clichés. Research remains essential – every story must be lived and verified before it is written.
Finally comes the practical dimension. The screenplay is not only art, but industry. It must be sellable, readable and filmable. The idea must be condensed into a single sentence – a logline that promises an experience. Rewrites are endless, compromises inevitable, but the purpose remains the same: to translate truth into action. In summary, journalists already command factual discipline, narrative structure and a sense of truth. To become good screenwriters, they must learn to think visually – to replace analysis with action, description with image, explanation with emotion. In doing so, they do not cease to be journalists; they continue to be what they have always been: people devoted to truth, now expressed not through words, but through light, movement and sound. As the American journalist Tom Wolfe observed, simple facts are not the truth; they are only the raw material from which truth is made.

3. The Media Scenario

3.1. Media and Narrative

Media Narratives in Conflict Management

'The single story creates stereotypes, and the problem with stereotypes is not that they are untrue, but that they are incomplete.'
— Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie

In the study[42] Media and Narrative: Conflict Management in Polarised Societies (2021) by the Institute for Integrated Transitions (IFIT), the authors examine how media can transform storytelling from an instrument of division into a means of social understanding. Digital technologies and social platforms have altered not only the circulation of stories, but also the ways societies determine what counts as truth and what is dismissed as fiction. In this environment of continuous content flow, media no longer merely reflect reality; they actively construct it through narratives that frame perception and guide action.
The authors argue that conflicts in polarised societies cannot be resolved by imposing a single authoritative version of events, but by encouraging a plurality of stories that allow different groups to be heard and situated within context. Narrative functions as a form of social memory and a moral compass. Through it, people define who 'we' are and who the 'others' are, what is just, what threatens the community, and which actions are considered legitimate. When societies fracture into hostile camps, narratives tend to simplify: each side casts itself as the victim while demonising the opponent. This process escalates tension because it eliminates complexity, erases intermediate positions, and turns public debate into a moral war. In such conditions, facts lose

[42] IFIT. (n.d.) 2021. Media and Narrative: Managing Conflict in Polarised Societies. [online] Available at: https://ifit-transitions.org/publications/media-and-narrative-managing-conflict-in-polarised-societies/.

their stabilising power and stories become tools of mobilisation and identity defence. The way out of this spiral lies in recognising the narrative structure of conflict itself – in learning to identify the stories that generate division and restoring a plurality of perspectives.

Throughout the twentieth century, traditional media – print, radio and television – set the rhythm of public storytelling. Although often aligned with power interests, they developed professional standards of verification and balance that created a minimal shared space of trust. In the digital era, these standards have been weakened. Every user can now produce content, while platforms governed by the logic of attention reward emotionally charged and simplified narratives. Public discourse becomes a competition between stories vying not for truth, but for visibility. Social media algorithms enclose audiences within echo chambers, where individuals encounter only confirmations of their own beliefs. The emotional rewards of outrage and belonging sustain this cycle, while dissenting views are perceived as threats. Traditional media are not immune to these pressures: the pursuit of ratings and clicks leads to similar dramaturgical simplifications. News becomes spectacle, conflict becomes a narrative engine, and the reporter increasingly assumes the role of a screenwriter of social drama. Political and economic actors exploit this knowledge to stage their own narratives, replacing reality with emotionally charged images. Yet despite these dynamics, media can also function as arenas of depolarisation.

According to IFIT, the key lies in building narrative literacy – the capacity of societies to recognise how stories are constructed, whose interests they serve, and how they can be critically assessed. Education in this sense does not imply censorship, but the cultivation of critical thinking and the ability to coexist with multiple versions of truth. Media ethics must be reoriented to encourage complexity rather than sensation. Grants and professional programmes can support journalists working in conflict environments and foster collaboration across newsrooms to ensure more balanced coverage. Equally important is cooperation between media organisations and communities, particularly marginalised groups and diasporas, enabling voices from the periphery to enter the centre of public debate. This produces a denser and more multidimensional map of social experience. Funding is no less crucial. Without independent and sustainable financial support, even the strongest editorial teams succumb to the pressures of clicks and advertising. Supporting local and regional media, as well as transnational platforms in the Global South, is vital for maintaining pluralism. Regulation also has a role – not to restrict expression, but to ensure transparency of ownership, protection against disinformation, and a balance of interests. Competition policies and tax incentives can ease commercial pressures and prioritise content that builds public trust.

In conclusion, media cannot and should not eliminate conflict; it is an inherent part of democratic life. They can, however, render it intelligible rather than destructive. When narratives multiply and are placed alongside one another instead of being mutually exclusive, societies learn to live with disagreement and transform it into a resource for renewal. In this sense, managing conflict through media does not mean seeking consensus, but creating conditions for coexistence between different truths – a space in which the drama of society can unfold without turning into war.

McLuhan Returns in the Interactive Age

'All media are extensions of some human faculty—psychic or physical.'
— Marshall McLuhan

In Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man[43] (1964), Marshall McLuhan poses the foundational question of how technologies transform human beings by turning their senses and habits into extensions of the media themselves. His famous claim that 'the medium is the message' appeared enigmatic in the age of television, but today, in the time of interactive platforms such as TikTok, Twitch, or Roblox, it reads like a diagnosis of everyday life. McLuhan understood media not as channels for transmitting content, but as environments that reconfigure perception and social relations. The electric light, he observed, has no content, yet it transforms human rhythm by extending the day. In the same way, the 'go live' button, emojis, or 'like' systems have no intrinsic meaning, yet they shape behaviour and social roles in communication. Form, not narrative, is the true message. McLuhan's distinction between 'hot' and 'cool' media described the balance between definition and participation: the former offered high definition with low involvement, the latter low definition with active co-authorship. In the digital era this boundary collapses. Social networks and online games simultaneously demand attention and participation. The viewer is no longer a passive consumer but a participant who produces content, interacts in real time, and influences the algorithms that then shape future experience. The medium becomes not merely a message, but gameplay: a structure of possibilities that prefigures how one acts and thinks. Here McLuhan's prophetic vision becomes fully visible. For him, each new technology does not simply accelerate communication; it reorganises social life. Television changed society not through its programmes, but through the way people experienced time and togetherness. The same applies today to virtual environments: what matters is not what happens at a concert in Roblox, but how the platform itself creates a new form of publicness, where audiences build, play, and communicate simultaneously. The 'global village' McLuhan foresaw is no longer a homogeneous space of spectators, but a network of micro-communities linked by protocols and rules that define what participation means. Contemporary media turn everyone into a role-player. The phone becomes an extension of the hand, the feed an extension of the nervous system, the avatar an extension of identity. People inhabit multiple parallel environments: a professional profile on LinkedIn, an artistic persona on Instagram, a gaming character on Discord or TikTok. Each platform has its own grammar—emojis, metrics, cooldowns, boosts—which not only communicate but train behaviour. Identity becomes dynamic and situational, constructed through rituals of display and response. Metrics—views, likes, retention rates—function as mirrors that educate conduct. McLuhan would have recognised here a new form of dependency. He warned that electric media could 'rent our nerves' for private use. Contemporary interactivity extends this risk: the same tools that give voice also enable surveillance. Hybrid media, simultaneously hot and cool, become systems of behavioural management through nudges, design norms, and attention cycles. Users believe they are participating, yet often merely perform roles scripted by the interface. Following McLuhan's logic, the task of media analysis is to uncover these hidden scripts. Attention should shift from stories to structures: what roles a platform creates, who controls moderation, how visibility is rewarded and silence penalised. New media must be studied as systems that design participation, not simply as channels of expression. McLuhan would also have insisted on 'detachment': the capacity to step outside the environment in order to perceive its force lines. In practice this means zones without metrics, slow modes, and experiments with reduced algorithmic mediation. Even the entertainment

[43] Mcluhan, M. (1964). Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man. Berkeley, Calif.: Gingko Press.

industry reflects this shift: franchises develop as open worlds inviting co-authorship; streaming transforms audiences into communities; virtual avatars demonstrate that identity has become an interface. McLuhan's aphorism thus requires an update: in the interactive age, the medium is the role. The message lies not only in content, but in the way the format inscribes us into a script of action. To understand media today is to understand the design of roles—who is allowed to act, who is observed, and what the rules of the game are. Only on this basis can a new form of media citizenship emerge, one that knows not only how to speak, but how to play fairly.

The Great Switch Within Us

'As computing becomes a public utility, the center of gravity of the information world shifts from individual machines to large-scale data centers.'
— Nicholas Carr

In The Big Switch: Rewiring the World, from Edison to Google (2008), Nick Carr describes how humanity moves from the era of personal computers to the global infrastructure of the 'cloud'—a computational service functioning as a public utility. Yet, as the book itself makes clear, the true 'switch' is not merely technological but anthropological. It takes place within us. Humans are transformed from an audience that passively consumes information into active nodes of a planetary mind—a living organism composed of interconnected data, actions, and memory. Carr emphasises that every movement within the network, every click and every shared file is an act of collective cognition in which machine and human learn from one another. This new cognitive cycle extends a long-standing ambition to connect knowledge directly to the mind, an idea articulated already in the early 2000s by Google's founders in their vision of the 'ultimate search engine'—a system capable of sensing the user's intentions. What once sounded like science fiction has since been surpassed by reality. Carr treats Google as the first factory of social knowledge. The PageRank algorithm turns every hyperlink into a vote—a microscopic act of judgement that, aggregated billions of times, produces an intelligence beyond the individual expert. Amazon's Mechanical Turk takes this logic further, transforming human participants into components of software logic: people performing cognitive tasks to train machines that ultimately learn to imitate them. In this process the audience dissolves into a labour force, and the boundary between employee and user disappears. Internet platforms have centralised cognition in the same way electric utilities once centralised power production—this time using human participation as energy. With the arrival of smartphones, social networks, and voice assistants, the 'big switch' becomes a billion small activations. Every individual feeds data, language, and habits into the system. Searches, routes, and translations shape an immense collective memory. In this global machine, humans are no longer mere users but its biological layer—the 'wet component' of the world computer. Carr sees here the emergence of a new form of consciousness, inherently multilingual and relational. Translation technologies, volunteer subtitling, and global online encyclopaedias have produced a shared memory in which languages, idioms, and cultures interact in real time. A sentence written in Sichuanese can be instantly rendered into Japanese or Portuguese without mediation. This multilingual intelligence does not merely archive knowledge; it coexists with humanity, because humanity continuously sustains it. Once, public utilities were external—you switched on the light when you needed illumination. Today, computational services live inside us. They complete our sentences, direct attention, shape routes and emotions. Through them, a new 'social physics' emerges, in which collective behaviour becomes measurable and optimisable. Traffic flows are regulated, diseases detected,

languages revived through shared participation. The machine remembers and responds; it becomes a mirror returning humanity's own knowledge back to itself. Yet this collective memory has a darker side. When the environment stores everything, people may lose the need to remember. Memory is outsourced, and identity becomes dependent on external data. Rather than producing 'flat' individuals, however, this process generates entangled identities—personal and public threads interwoven within a shared network. The crucial question becomes what must remain local—the memories that constitute the personal self—and what should be shared—the facts belonging to collective knowledge. Here Carr draws an analogy with industrialisation: human labour is converted into digital value, concentrated within platform aggregators. For this reason he argues for new forms of co-ownership and governance of shared memory, not only as an economic issue but as an ethical one. When machines learn from everyone, everyone must have a voice in determining what is learned and how. The problems are no longer merely technical but civic: what consent means when data are gathered ambiently; how a 'right to be forgotten' can be formulated in systems whose power lies in perpetual recall; who defines the language of truth when languages themselves carry distinct worldviews. And yet Carr remains a cautious optimist. In the everyday actions of millions he sees the builders of a planetary conscience: a teacher sharing lesson plans, a poet posting a stanza, a driver marking an obstacle on the road. Each contributes a thread to the network, often unaware that they are nourishing a global intelligence. The great switch is not a single event but a continuous process—the gradual connection of humanity to its own mind. According to Carr, the task of our time is not simply to use this mind, but to civilise it: to establish norms, rights, and cultural rituals worthy of a species that has managed to connect itself through the memory of the world. The computer becomes a service-delivery machine, and the idea of the 'personal computer' fades away. Machines are no longer under the control of their owners.

The Screen Is the Retina of the Mind

'The television screen is the retina of the mind's eye. Therefore the television screen is part of the physical structure of the brain. Therefore whatever appears on the television screen becomes raw experience for those who watch it. Therefore television is reality, and reality is less than television.''

— Brian O'Blivion, Videodrome (1983)

In the spirit of the vision articulated by Professor Brian O'Blivion in David Cronenberg's Videodrome (1983), the contemporary digital age confirms that media is no longer a window onto reality but its very structure. What Marshall McLuhan once described as the 'extension of man' has today become full absorption. Screens no longer merely project the world; they compute it, rank it and translate it into gameplay. The internet is no longer a mirror of reality but its game engine. Users become characters, likes turn into points, and narrative becomes a dynamic campaign in which every post, reply and remix is a move on the board of attention. Each social platform functions as a server for a massive online game in which participation is compulsory: post, react, argue, remix, and you are already inside.

Television once gathered millions around a single story and a single screen. The new virtual environment disperses audiences across countless parallel worlds, where visibility replaces truth and speed replaces argument. Algorithms set the rules. The faster the reaction, the higher the

rank; the stronger the emotion, the further the message travels. The mechanics of attention become the fundamental law of the social. Every post has an objective: to be noticed. Every comment becomes a weapon, every remix a tactical manoeuvre in a cultural conflict. The screen is no longer a stage but a battlefield, where drama is calculated in engagement percentages.

Online identity now functions as a role-playing system. Usernames operate as classes, avatars as skins, biographies as builds, and posting style as a character's weapon. Users construct backstories through threads, accumulate artefacts in the form of quotes and images, and join guilds—groups, forums and servers—where strategies are refined. Algorithms reward skilled play: knowledge of memes, the correct tone, timing and theme. In doing so, the system trains taste. It teaches what to say, how to frame it, whom to attack and how to extract maximum drop in the form of likes and shares. The game is not merely a metaphor; it is a functioning economy. The reward loop is tangible: likes, duets, creator tiers, trends, partnerships and monetisation. Measurable success becomes currency. Accumulate social proof and unlock offline bonuses—contracts, appearances, sponsorships. The internet rewards recognisability, not truth. Popularity becomes value, and value becomes power. Like all progression systems, this environment encourages both cooperation and competition. Collaborations become temporary alliances for joint raids—podcasts, livestreams, video formats—until the same allies turn into rivals in the next struggle for attention. The public visibility of metrics transforms participants into opponents. When the scoreboard is open, hesitation appears as weakness and nuance as lost points. Algorithms reward extremity because it sustains the game's energy. Gradually the feed restructures human judgement. The world is perceived not through credibility but through informational performance. News that provokes reaction feels more real than news that is verified. Fact-checking becomes a debuff—a delay that costs visibility. Platforms punish hesitation more than error, and so participants learn to act first and think later. This logic reshapes journalism, politics and culture alike. News is packaged as mini-plots, politicians adopt the rhythm of streamers, and audiences become players who vote with clicks.

Reality framed as a game carries serious risks. Systems that reward immediate reaction suppress reflection. Systems that measure outrage turn it into fuel. Systems that count attention reduce meaning to statistics. The result is a culture of perpetual dramatisation, where consensus seems obsolete and conflict becomes a self-sustaining product. Corrections no longer end disputes but feed the next cycle. Withdrawal is not an exit, because abstention itself becomes a move on the board. A more viable response is conscious participation: understanding which game a given action feeds, which rules structure the field and which values are rewarded. This demands media literacy not as a technical skill but as an ethical compass. Virtual environments can also become spaces of cooperation, creativity and solidarity, but only if participants grasp the mechanics that govern them. Online reality is a game because human communication now unfolds within systems that operate through rules, points and rewards. Digital life has become a continuous competition for attention, where the algorithm is the referee and every gesture a meta-move. The real question is not whether we are inside the game, but how we play it: with what principles, toward which ends, and with how much humanity intact. Because if the screen is the retina of the mind, then the choices made before it determine not only what we see, but who we become.

Sapiens versus Mendax

'Large numbers of strangers can cooperate successfully by believing in common myths.'
— Yuval Noah Harari

In his book[44] Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind (2011), Yuval Noah Harari describes the human being as 'an animal that believes in stories'. According to him, the capacity to invent, share and sustain common myths is what turned Homo sapiens into the dominant species on the planet. Yet within this strength lies a weakness. The storytelling human is also the lying human, Homo Mendax—a creature that cannot live without fictions, but often forgets that it has invented them. Narrative is the currency with which civilisation purchases meaning, and the lie is the tax paid for that meaning. The romantic consumerism Harari describes is the contemporary religion of Mendax. It does not sell objects but identities. A Rolex or an iPhone is not merely a thing but a story through which one signs one's belonging to the mythology of success. We do not buy a watch but prestige, not a journey but a role—the tourist, the explorer, the pilgrim. Every receipt is a ticket to a small drama in which the self stages itself. The more stories Mendax consumes, the more tightly he wraps himself in them, until the distinction between truth and advertisement dissolves.

Harari proposes a simple yet profound typology of reality. The objective exists independently of belief—gravity is not offended if it is denied. The subjective inhabits the individual mind—dreams, pain, memories. Between them lies the intersubjective: the collective imagination that makes money, states, laws, corporations and gods possible. All of these are invented, yet precisely for that reason they function—because many people believe in them simultaneously. This is the genius of Sapiens: the ability to invent order and submit to it. It is also the curse of Mendax: forgetting that this order is imagined and beginning to worship it as a law of nature. From Sumerian clay tablets to the digital codes of the twenty-first century, human history is an evolution of fictions. Writing did not emerge from poetry but from accounting, from the need to track debts, taxes, livestock and transactions. Yet every calculation generates a myth—the need to legitimise numbers with stories, to attach emotion to abstraction. Mathematics and mythology intertwine: one counts, the other persuades. Empires are built with numbers but maintained with words. The double language between knowledge and deception, between declaration and concealment, is the instrument through which Mendax sustains power. The same people write about equality while owning slaves, call for peace while preparing wars. This is not a moral anomaly but a structural feature of culture. It survives through compromise between the instinct for cooperation and the egoism of ambition. Stories justify us when facts expose us. Narrative thus becomes not merely an explanation but a mechanism of moral economy.

The most successful lie Harari identifies is money. It is a purely imaginary object—a piece of paper or a line of code that survives only as long as everyone believes in it. Yet this illusion makes global coordination possible. Money translates human trust into a universal language: I do not trust you, but I trust that you believe in the same symbol. Mendax has discovered the genius of deception that functions precisely because no one calls it deception. Empire, the supreme form of coordination, rests on standardised narratives: units, laws, markets, bureaucracies, shared concepts of time and value. It offers a 'we' to anyone who adopts its grammar. But this 'we' is artificial and reversible, a conditional alliance. To be a citizen, one must forget one's local accent and repeat the phrases of the imperial narrative: property, progress, growth. Mendax is the ideal courtier—adaptive, eloquent, convinced that truth is a matter of a successful plot. Science, born from the acknowledgement of ignorance, becomes the new religion of modernity. It maps empty

[44] Harari, Y.N. (2015). Sapiens: a Brief History of Humankind. New York: Harper Perennial.

spaces in order to explore them, but in alliance with capital it turns them into resources. Ignorance becomes an excuse for expansion. Faith in progress replaces faith in salvation. Capitalism, heir to theology, also relies on miracles—credit, for example, is belief in the future taken on loan. Mendax thus acquires a new form: no longer lying about the past, but about the future.

Seen in this light, the opposition between Sapiens and Mendax is not a moral drama but an internal tension within human nature. Sapiens knows that myth is a tool for collective action, a necessary fiction that must remain transparent. Mendax takes it for reality, turns the mediator into an idol and replaces life with its glittering symbol. The former uses stories to connect people; the latter uses them to govern them. To live as Sapiens is to know that the world is made of stories and to use them without losing oneself in them. To live as Mendax is to believe that the story is reality itself. The real choice is not between truth and falsehood, but between awareness and delusion: between recognising that the rules were invented and accepting them as fate. Harari reminds us that humanity will remain free only if it does not forget this distinction. For the moment stories cease to be told as stories, Sapiens will finally and irrevocably become Mendax.

Manufacture of Gods

'Religious representations are collective representations which express collective realities.'
— Émile Durkheim

In his book[45] The Gods Machine (2014), Serge Moscovici examines the origin of religious feeling not as divine revelation but as a social process, as a collective and shared narrative through which societies give meaning to their own existence. For Moscovici, the 'machine for producing gods' is not a metaphor but an exact description of society itself, which incessantly transforms fear and hope into symbols, rituals and power. Gods are not born from the heavens but from the human need to organise the chaos of emotions and impulses into an ordered world in which every action carries a sanction and every suffering an explanation. Social psychology, in Moscovici's understanding, is not an auxiliary discipline but a theory of how human communities create order through representations. The moment individuals gather, a new field of energy emerges: thoughts and emotions synchronise, collective impulses are generated, and from them arise images of authority, guilt and salvation. Religion is precisely this process of materialising the invisible, of transforming social tension into myth. God is the gaze of the community watching us from within, embedded in every 'superego'. In this way society packages coercion in the language of duty: the individual submits not to a command but to a conscience that has been collectively produced. Durkheim is one of Moscovici's central inspirations: the religious is the social. In order to endure, society requires the sacred, a zone inaccessible to the ordinary. The sacred is the symbol of collective force, and the totem is its visible form: a flag, a coat of arms, an image, a currency. The totem is not an idol but a cognitive instrument through which the world is classified and boundaries of belonging are drawn. When a group believes in a totem, it does not believe in an object but in itself, clothed in symbol. Belief is always shared; the solitary individual has no religion, only hallucinations.

Modernity, according to Moscovici, 'kills' God by stripping him of his mediating function. Rational man proclaims himself autonomous, yet remains dependent on the invisible

[45] Serge Moscovici (2014). La Machine à faire des Dieux. Fayard.

mechanisms of social belief. The vacant place of God is filled by new sacred ideas: the nation, the state, ideology, money. Their power is no weaker because it requires no miracles, only habit. The modern order institutionalises discipline just as ancient cultures institutionalised ecstasy. Where ancestors sang and danced, modern humans plan and calculate. If older rituals produced community through exaltation, new ones do so through norms. From this follows the function of crime and punishment: they sustain belief in order. Crime is the moment when the collective 'we' is put to the test; punishment is the ritual that restores violated solidarity. Its meaning is moral as much as juridical. When society loses its capacity to believe, it fragments into small sects, in which new gods—leaders, idols, celebrities—occupy the vacant space of the sacred. In the modern world, money assumes this role. Moscovici sees it as the most perfected totem of our time: abstract, bodiless, yet omnipotent. Money translates every quality into quantity, every relation into transaction. With money, the need for trust disappears, because the symbol itself guarantees exchange. Yet herein lies its religious character: belief in its value is collective and irrational. Money is our common god, a universal mediator between strangers, a visible sign of invisible trust. It demands worship through labour, restraint and perpetual growth, promising salvation in the form of profit.

Moscovici is not a moralist but an analyst of belief. He shows that even when we proclaim the 'death of God', we continue to produce gods, new idols around which to gather. Technology, nationalism, science and the market are merely different versions of the same social function: translating the infinite into comprehensible symbols. Every era has its sacred bodies and its heresies. When science occupies the place of religion, it too becomes surrounded by rituals: statistics, experiments, rankings, experts. The difference is that today's prophet speaks in the language of data rather than miracles. The Enlightenment concludes with the recognition that this factory for Manufacture of Gods cannot be shut down. Society will always generate sacred figures, because without them it cannot live. The question is not how to stop production, but how to make it conscious: how to create gods that reflect mutual recognition rather than fear of the other. To use collective belief as a means of solidarity rather than an instrument of domination. Gods do not disappear; they merely change their names. And the more rational we become, the more urgently we require a new myth to justify our shared existence.

The Rise of the Reader

'The text is a machine designed to generate interpretations.'
— Umberto Eco

In his essay 'The Death of the Author' (1967), Roland Barthes announces the end of one cultural epoch and the beginning of another. His provocative claim that 'the birth of the reader must be paid for by the death of the author' sounds like a manifesto of postmodernism, yet today it reads as a prophecy of the digital age. At the centre of contemporary media no longer stands the writer, the director or the producer, but the reader—the viewer, the participant, the user—who does not merely receive meaning but actively produces it. The author dissolves into the audience, and meaning ceases to be a gift bestowed from above, becoming instead an act of collective invention. Barthes shifts attention from intention to interpretation. He demonstrates that a work is not a finished object but a 'tissue of quotations', woven from pre-existing cultural codes and voices. Every text is composed of many earlier texts, and its meaning comes into being only at the moment of reading. At that moment the reader becomes a co-author, not by altering the

words, but by arranging them within an imaginary space shaped by personal associations, memories and experience. The author dies so that the text may live in endlessly renewed readings.

In the digital age this literary thesis becomes a concrete media practice. The network knows no passive audience. Every click, comment, remix or share is an act of co-authorship. Content is continuously rewritten, and the boundary between viewing and participation dissolves. A YouTube video, a TikTok feed or a virtual-world game is not a fixed work but an open script, rewritten by each user through presence and response. The text is no longer a linear narrative but an ecosystem of choices and gestures that evolves according to how people inhabit it. A new form of reading emerges—interactive, networked, performative. The reader does not merely decode but performs the text. Perspective is chosen, narrative threads are arranged, responses and versions are generated. On social platforms every gesture—reaction, repost, duet, collaboration—is a form of interpretation translated into action. The network becomes an endless commentary, a living field of interpretation in which meaning is never final. In this world the author holds no monopoly over the work; they are merely the first player in a collective game of meaning.

This transformation is clearly visible in mass genres. Television, once demanding a stationary viewer before a single screen, becomes an interactive arena: series are rewritten by fans, endings are chosen by audiences, narratives evolve in response to online reactions. News unfolds in real time, and stories expand horizontally rather than vertically. Every audience is also an editor, every act of viewing an editorial intervention. The rise of the reader also signals the erosion of authority. There is no longer a single source of truth or interpretation, but a plural chorus of perspectives. Collective authorship does not abolish meaning; it democratises it. Truth becomes a process of negotiation rather than command. This produces a new culture of participation, along with new responsibilities, because when everyone writes, everyone bears responsibility for tone, context and consequence.

Barthes could scarcely have imagined a world in which his theory would become everyday reality. Yet his essay precisely anticipates the contemporary media condition: narrative no longer belongs to the narrator but to the community that interprets, circulates and transforms it. Within this dynamic lie both the power and the risk of the present moment. The reader gains the freedom to become an author but loses the security of stable meaning. In a world of endless participation, significance is never final; each reading becomes a new version of reality. Thus the ‘death of the author’ concludes not in mourning but in resurrection—the resurrection of the reader. In contemporary media the text is a living organism, nourished by the attention and imagination of its audience. Every story is a script open to millions of co-authors. Reading becomes action, spectatorship becomes play, and participation becomes a new form of writing. The rise of the reader marks a profound turn in cultural evolution. The world is no longer narrated by a single voice, but by a chorus speaking simultaneously, interrupting and supplementing one another. This is not merely a new media model but a new model of thought: truth as dialogue, meaning as a network, and creativity as a shared experience. In this chorus, anyone who was once only a reader now writes the world while reading it.

The Logic of Deconstruction

'Structure organizes, balances, and orients the play of its elements. But the center that governs the structure itself escapes structurality.'
— Jacques Derrida

In the essay[46] 'Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences' (La structure, le signe et le jeu dans le discours des sciences humaines), Jacques Derrida introduces the notion of 'deconstruction' as a mode of thinking and reading that does not destroy meaning but releases it. Its aim is not to abolish language, but to show that every construction of meaning is possible only through displacement, through its constant instability and oscillation. For Derrida, deconstruction is not a destructive act but a condition of meaning itself: a way of seeing how language operates not through stability, but through difference, absence and deferral. At the core of this logic lies the insight that Western thought has always sought a 'centre'—a stable point of reference that would guarantee truth. Philosophy and theology, from Plato to Heidegger, build their systems on the belief that behind words stands an ultimate meaning, a 'transcendental signified' toward which everything points. God, reason, being, law—these are names for the same centre, which orders the world and secures coherence. Derrida shows, however, that this centre is an illusion: each time thought attempts to grasp it, it merely produces a new metaphor, a new figure that replaces the old one and sustains the play between dominant and subordinate terms. Language thus appears not as a transparent window onto truth, but as a field of tensions in which meanings arise through opposition. Every word acquires value from what it is not; meaning is born from difference rather than presence. This is the force of Derrida's well-known term différance—at once difference and deferral. Through it, Derrida demonstrates that language does not simply distinguish meanings but holds them in motion: the sign always points beyond itself, to another sign, another level of interpretation. Truth is not attained but pursued, and this endless deferral is not a weakness but the energy that keeps thought alive.

The paradox is that this difference becomes visible only in writing, not in speech. In French, différence and différance sound identical; the distinction between them is purely graphic. With this gesture Derrida undermines the centuries-old privilege philosophy has accorded to speech as the expression of living presence. Writing, long regarded as secondary and dead, proves to be a necessary condition of all communication. Without inscription, without mark, without trace, even speech could not be differentiated. Presence itself thus turns out to depend on the absence it seeks to exclude. From this follows another key moment in the logic of deconstruction: the notion of aporia. An aporia is a situation in which language becomes entangled in its own contradictions and cannot offer a single, determinate resolution. For traditional philosophy, aporia is a problem; for Derrida, it is an opportunity. It is precisely in these impasses that the workings of the system become visible, that meaning is shown to arise not from harmony but from tension. Aporia does not close thought; it opens it. It marks the moment when thinking ceases to seek certainty and begins to perceive the structures that produce it. In this sense, deconstruction is an ethical mode of reading: it does not deny truth but places it under responsibility. To deconstruct a text is to see how its meaning depends on what it excludes—on the marginal, the feminine, the colonial, the unconscious. Meaning is not monolithic but layered; it always contains its own shadow. When reading, one does not destroy but listens for this second voice, the one that remains unspoken yet without which no construction could endure. Derrida is often accused of turning philosophy into an endless game in which nothing can be finally affirmed. For him, however, play is not arbitrariness; it is the very life of language.

[46] Derrida, J. (1978) Writing and Difference. Translated by A. Bass. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Meaning cannot be fixed because it is generated through differentiation, through movement between words and their mutual reflections. Language is not a tool for expressing thought but the medium in which thought itself arises. The construction of meaning is possible only because it is never fully complete.
Deconstruction is therefore not a negation but a gesture of attentiveness. It teaches us to read between the lines, to notice the tensions within the concepts we use to think, and to recognise how contingent every supposedly 'natural' distinction is. In Derrida's world, to seek an absolute centre is to forget that language is always a network rather than an axis. Only by accepting this movement can thinking truly begin. The logic of deconstruction thus reveals itself as a logic of creation: meaning is not given but produced through the instability of signs. Every word is a fissure through which the world continues to be rethought. To deconstruct is not to demolish but to build carefully—on uncertainty rather than dogma. It is precisely in this vulnerability that language reveals its strength: it is not a temple of truth, but an endless workshop in which meaning is continuously reinvented.

Social 'Gameplay'

'Play is older than culture, for culture, however inadequately defined, always presupposes human society, and animals have not waited for man to teach them their playing.'
— Johan Huizinga

Postmodern theory, from Roland Barthes to Jacques Derrida and Jean-François Lyotard, marks a transition from a world built upon stable structures and 'grand narratives' to a reality in which everything functions as play. After the 'death of the author' and the collapse of universal truths, meaning is no longer imposed from above but constructed from within, through participation. Public space, literature, and the media are transformed into an open world in which everyone plays a role: the reader becomes a level designer, the spectator a scriptwriter, and the critic a moderator who monitors the rules of the game. The grand narrative with its Author and Truth is replaced by a network of voices that constantly rewrite the scenario.
Barthes deprives the author of the privilege of fixing meaning and transfers it to the reader. The book ceases to be a declaration and becomes a 'tissue of quotations'—a set of resources that anyone may rearrange. This is the moment when the linear campaign of modern narrative turns into a sandbox, an open game without a fixed ending. The reader, viewer, or user chooses their path, invents missions, and develops new versions of the plot. Foucault extends this shift by removing the figure of the 'great individual' from history: it is not authors but discourses, institutions, and regimes of power that move events. Every culture possesses its own engine—an invisible software that compiles subjects and determines what can be thought, said, and seen. Derrida, through deconstruction, completes the passage from truth to play. Language, he argues, has no stable centre; meaning is generated through the differences between the signs that surround it. If modern philosophy sought a 'transcendental signified', postmodern thought finds only différance—an endless deferral and redirection of meaning. This is an infinite skill tree in which each term unlocks another, and no 'final boss' exists. The critic no longer 'deciphers' the text but maps its mechanics: how it produces its rules, how it conceals or exposes its power, how it plays with itself. Lyotard describes the end of 'grand narratives'—the ideologies, religions, and utopias that claim universal truth. In their place remain multiple local narratives, small servers of meaning in which each community constructs its own order and its own missions. Truth ceases to be a metaphysical constant and becomes the product of interpretative

communities, as Stanley Fish argues. Each group of participants has its own meta, its own rules and balances of play—its own definition of what counts as ‘fair’ and ‘just’ play. Objective meaning becomes a UX convention, the result of shared use and collective maintenance of the server.

Feminist and postcolonial theory expand this social gameplay by adding new modes to the core game. They deconstruct binaries such as male/female, centre/periphery, white/non-white, transforming static categories into dynamic parameters. In game terms, this is expanded character creation—more roles, more styles of participation, more ways of inhabiting the world. When language opens in this way, identity becomes a process rather than an essence; roles may shift without leaving the game. In this new regime, the text behaves like game design. It does not contain meaning but offers a mechanism for producing it. The author no longer programs a plot but provides an interface through which others can play. Politics, media, and culture follow the same logic: campaigns unfold as PvP duels for attention, memes operate as updates to the collective imagination, and journalism and education become cooperative missions. The citizen is no longer a spectator but an active player participating in the construction of the public scenario. Postmodern culture blurs the boundary between play and reality. Recommendation algorithms and social networks are its engine: they distribute roles, filter visibility, and determine which stories will be played. As narratives turn into interactive platforms, authorship becomes distributed. The canon loses authority, replaced by an endless flow of headcanons—personal versions of the world. Every participant has the right to interpretation, but also the responsibility to sustain it with ethical care.

This social gameplay, however, is not without risks. When no common centre exists, the danger of chaos, trolling, and manipulation emerges. The solution is not a return to the old Author-God, but the construction of an ethics of play. Truth is understood as the reproducibility of moves: can you show your sources, explain your logic, play transparently? If so, it is a good game. The postmodern world gains participation, freedom, and creativity, but loses the stability of a unified narrative—a stability that was always an illusion of the old interface. The new order is not one of authorities but of literate players: those who know how to read the rules of the world as one reads a text, and how to recognise the engines that drive stories. Postmodernism begins as critique, as the deconstruction of centres, but today it manifests as a social regime of play. After the death of the author, silence does not follow, but a polyphonic, interactive world in which truth is sought not through dogma, but through play.

Life Without Truth

"The result of a consistent and total substitution of lies for factual truth is not that lies will now be accepted as truth, and truth be defamed as lies, but that the sense by which we take our bearings in the real world — and the category of truth versus falsehood is among the mental means to this end — is being destroyed."

- Hannah Arendt

After the concept of ‘post-truth’ entered public discourse, it became clear that the world no longer lives with large, shared truths. This is not a catastrophe, but a new cultural condition in which people must learn to exist without a centre, without an official arbiter of reality. Truth does not disappear; it simply ceases to be singular. In the age of the internet, social networks, and global communication, a polyphony emerges that cannot be arranged hierarchically. Every

participant has their own microphone, camera, and platform, and the public narrative becomes a network of fragments that no one can assemble into a single coherent story.

This condition, commonly described as ‘post-truth’, arises from the very structure of digital media. The internet not only accelerates the circulation of information but also dissolves the stability of the source. Any news item can be rewritten, shared, deleted, or replaced by a version that feels more compelling. ‘Truthiness’, a term introduced by Merriam-Webster in 2006, describes belief in something because it sounds right rather than because it has been verified. By 2016, when ‘post-truth’ was named Word of the Year by Oxford Dictionaries, this phenomenon had taken a recognisable form: reality was measured not by evidence, but by emotional conviction. This shift reveals that truth has ceased to function as a social contract. It becomes personal property, a component of identity. Recommendation algorithms sustain this condition by filtering content so that each user encounters their own reflection. Media cease to operate as shared spaces of discussion and turn into echo chambers. What was once a public arena is now a series of parallel realities in which facts have no common currency. Truth becomes local, tribal, and self-reinforcing. In such an environment, disinformation does not appear primarily as deliberate falsehood, but as a side effect of the technology itself. Research[47] by the Pew Research Center on ‘The Future of Truth and Misinformation Online’ (2017) shows that even when reliable data are available, people tend to believe what aligns with their emotions and prior convictions. The internet merely amplifies an ancient tendency: to trust what resembles ourselves. Truth loses authority because it is no longer sustained by shared institutions, but by isolated groups that trust only their own sources.

From this point onward, society must learn to live without grand truths. This does not mean embracing cynicism or indifference, but developing a new form of cultural literacy: the ability to navigate multiplicity without searching for a single, definitive centre. After the end of official truth comes the era of responsible interpretation. Instead of waiting for the media or the state to provide meaning, individuals must construct it consciously through verification, context, and dialogue. Truth is no longer a given, but a practice. It requires not belief, but effort. When every person is simultaneously author and reader, responsibility for meaning cannot be delegated. In this new world, journalism, education, and science cannot guarantee absolute certainty; they can only teach methods of verification. Technology may assist, but it cannot resolve the problem, because the problem is human. The internet does not liberate societies; it transforms forms of power. Where truth was once an instrument of the state, it is now an instrument of attention. In this situation, the post-truth world resembles a market of moral sensations. Everyone sells their version of reality, and its value is determined by the number of likes. Power no longer belongs to facts, but to emotions. Propaganda mutates into an algorithm that rewards moral outrage and penalises complexity. Truth, which demands time, verification, and context, loses to speed.

To live without truth therefore means to cultivate a new resilience: the ability to think slowly in a fast world. Media reflect this transition as a mirror of culture. McLuhan was right that every new technology amplifies and distorts perception at the same time. The internet amplifies access but destroys distance; it connects but polarises; it democratises expression but fragments community. Grand narratives—religion, nation, ideology—disintegrate into small screens, each with its own truth. Society becomes a network of micro-truths that coexist in parallel and collide without mediation. To live without truth is to accept that meaning is no longer guaranteed from outside. This is a difficult, but potentially liberating process. Instead of returning to lost centres, new forms of trust can be built—local, provisional, and verifiable. In the post-truth world, truth has no throne, but it can have a practice: in the effort to check sources, to ask questions, and to

[47] Pew Research Center (2017) The Future of Truth and Misinformation Online. Washington, D.C.: Pew Research Center. Available at: https://www.pewresearch.org.

acknowledge complexity. This is the ethics of informational maturity. The end of truth is not the end of meaning, but its redistribution. In this polyphonic world, truth is no longer a ruler, but a guest who appears only when invited with care. Learning to live without it means seeking it not in institutions, but in the responsibility of each participant—in the effort to discern, to doubt, and to resist convenient stories. Truth does not die; it disperses—and waits to be gathered again, this time without masters. Life without truth becomes life with its imitation, with something like truthfulness that sounds convincing but is never fully true.

Every Narrative Is Political

'Politics and art, like forms of knowledge, produce "fictions", that is, reconfigurations of the sensible through which new forms of collective enunciation become visible.'
— Jacques Rancière

In his essay[48] Politics of Fiction, Jacques Rancière develops an idea that overturns the classical understanding of the relationship between art and politics. For him, the political dimension of a work does not lie in the ideology it expresses or the position it takes, but in the way a text organises time and events. Form itself – the structure of the narrative, its rhythm, the montage of moments – determines what counts as an 'event', who is entitled to experience time, and whose time is narratable at all. In this sense, the aesthetic is always political, because every narrative is an attempt to impose an order on time. Rancière returns to Aristotle's claim in the Poetics that poetry is 'more philosophical' than history, because it does not describe what has happened, but what could happen. Yet behind this principle lies a deep hierarchy. Aristotle separates the 'acting' from the 'mechanical': those who have time for choice and deliberation from those whose time is reduced to cycles of labour and exhaustion. Fiction, in the form of tragedy or epic, belongs to the former, to lives deemed worthy of plot. Rancière shows that modern art begins precisely when this hierarchy is disrupted, when people without power, without 'great' events, without heroic time enter the centre of the narrative. The story no longer necessarily depicts political drama, but redistributes attention in such a way that the most ordinary moment acquires the weight of an event. The traditional chain of actions that drives the plot is broken and replaced by a time without telos, a time that simply flows. In this, Rancière sees the true democratisation of fiction: narrative no longer belongs to heroes, but to everyone.

The politics of fiction manifests itself in how a text rearranges the sensible, in how it decides what will be visible, audible, and meaningful. When a writer or journalist selects which event to narrate and how to connect it to others, they exercise power over time. For Rancière this power is double-edged. It can reinforce the existing order, but it can also unsettle it by giving voice to what usually remains outside the frame. In this sense, literature and journalism share the same function: they are forms of montage that arrange events and produce a sense of reality. Journalism, Rancière argues, is also a kind of fiction, not because it invents facts, but because it constructs a form of time. News narratives present the world as a sequence of causal relations: who did what, when, why, and what follows. Every evening bulletin reinstates an Aristotelian intrigue, with a beginning, a climax, and a resolution. This syntax suggests that the world is rational, predictable, and governable. But another possibility exists: a text can present time as fragmentation, as the coexistence of unsynchronised rhythms, as a field in which nothing can suddenly become everything.

[48] Rancière, J. (2019) The Politics of Fiction. Translated by D. Panagia. Durham: Duke University Press.

The example of the internet and online media is instructive. Social networks seem to refuse deep analysis of political or social problems. Instead, they record and circulate movements, desires, and opinions. In these almost plotless scenes, time unfolds slowly, outside the journalistic logic of cause and effect. Here the political is not a slogan, but the restoration of a rhythm in which people actually live, a time excluded from official history. Fiction thus appears not as the opposite of reality, but as its alternative. It does not deny facts, but offers another way of connecting them. Every text, from the novel to the news article, is an attempt to script the world, to define boundaries of importance and to impose order on the chaos of events. The political begins where this ordering is questioned, where time ceases to be a smooth line and becomes a space of possibility.

In this way, audiovisual content moves closer to literature: endless montages of scenes cut from reality, whose ethical weight depends not only on factual accuracy but on the way they are arranged. A single image, a pause, or a sentence can reshape an entire world of perception. Rancière reminds us that political action begins precisely here, in the possibility of changing how time is felt and narrated. The aesthetic is therefore political because every ordering of time is an act of power. Fiction does not merely reflect the world; it shapes it by deciding what counts as an event and whose experience enters history. For this reason, news itself is a form of fiction: it does not invent, but composes. It sustains or transforms the temporal order in which society believes it lives.

The Truth of Beauty

"Beauty is the form of the purposefulness of an object, insofar as it is perceived in it without the idea of a purpose."
– Immanuel Kant

Beauty is dangerous not because it blinds, but because it orders. It gathers what is scattered, gives form to chaos, and creates a sense of shared order. When many people perceive the same thing as beautiful, a rhythm of agreement emerges between them — a moment of simultaneous seeing. This is precisely why contemporary culture so often imposes fragmentation: endless speed, broken meanings, streams of images that refuse to cohere into a narrative. The ugly, the chaotic, and the accidental disperse attention, while the beautiful concentrates it. The power of beauty is the power of structure — it is the invisible syntax that makes the world intelligible. In the age of digital media, this power has shifted to the screen. New technologies can produce dazzling visions — sound, colour, movement — but without narrative and inner architecture, all of this remains merely a flow of sensations. Beauty does not arise from effect, but from the order that organises it. Without structure there is no form, without form there is no memory. Even the most impressive visual experience, in a world of 8K resolutions and algorithmic symmetry, loses its meaning if it cannot be told — if it does not possess time, rhythm, and direction.

The creator of the twenty-first century no longer stands before a canvas, but before an interface. Yet the task remains the same as it has always been — to find a structure through which the world can be shared. To create not merely images, but relations between them; not merely sound, but music. Destruction is always tempting, because it appears modern — as a rejection of cliché, harmony, and narrative. But creation is destruction with a reversed sign: it overcomes noise in order to produce a common space. In a world where content is infinite and attention is the scarcest resource, structure is what transforms information into art. The most refined audio-visual projects of the present prove this. Whether films, music videos, games, or virtual worlds,

they are remembered not for the quantity of effects, but for the rhythm of their construction. A scene is beautiful not because it is realistic, but because it has a place within a story. Montage is the grammar of time; the frame is a sentence; music is punctuation. Narrative remains the invisible matrix that binds everything together — it is the breath of form, that which makes an experience not merely impressive, but alive.

The freedom promised by digital media — to stream, remix, and rearrange — is infinite, but without order it becomes a tyranny of chaos. Algorithms offer speed, but also a subtle monotony: cycles of emotion, predictable peaks, automated reactions. Within this stream of fragments, the true artist is the one who restores meaning — who finds rhythm in noise and returns time to art. Beauty here is not an escape from technology, but its mastery: to subject infinity to a finished form, to turn data into a breathing narrative. The aesthetics of the new century will be media-based, but also narrative. A video that moves us always tells a story, even without words; music that endures always has motion and development; an image that does not disappear contains a story. Beginning, tension, climax, pause — these are not outdated rules, but natural laws of human perception. Without them, even the most perfect experience collapses, because nothing holds attention together. Beauty is the architecture of the senses: the ordering through which feelings acquire logic and logic acquires humanity.

The truth of beauty does not lie in impressing, but in connecting. It creates a shared space of understanding, where time is not merely a flow, but a story that can be shared. And the more screens multiply, the greater the need for this inner order — for a narrative that translates the infinity of data into human meaning. Beauty does not prove; it gathers. It does not impose; it arranges. In a world intoxicated by informational chaos, the truth of beauty remains in the ability to construct structure — the invisible frame in which life, for a moment, appears whole. Without narrative there is no form, without form there is no community, and without community there is no art. Beauty is not merely a reflection of the world; it is its grammar — the final order through which we are still able to tell stories. The truth of beauty is that there may be post-truth and 'truthiness', but there can be no post-beauty — every imitation of beauty inevitably turns into kitsch. One can live with an illusion of truth, but one cannot live without the truth of beauty.

3.2. Time and Narrative

The Argument for Narrativity

"Time becomes human time to the extent that it is organized according to the model of narrative."
– Paul Ricoeur

'The argument for narrativity' is one of the central theses developed by Paul Ricœur in his monumental study[49] Time and Narrative. Departing from Roland Barthes's well-known assertion that 'there is no people without stories', Ricœur shifts the emphasis: it is not enough to say that humans tell stories — the crucial question is what stories do, how they organise time, action, and human coexistence. For Ricœur, narrative is a universal human capacity, akin to language and symbol, through which people construct meaning and understand themselves and the world they inhabit. Narrativity thus acquires the status of an anthropological constant rather than a mere

[49] Dowling, W.C. (2011). Ricoeur on Time and Narrative. University of Notre Dame Pess

cultural product. This position distinguishes Ricœur from structuralist approaches, which focus on linguistic systems, codes, and oppositions, often displacing attention from the acting subject to abstract structures. Within those models, narrative is analysed as a grammar of rules and functions.

Ricœur acknowledges the value of structural methods but criticises them for frequently eliminating the living subject and its purposiveness. His project therefore seeks to restore the agent, motivation, and temporality as essential dimensions of narrative. As an example of structural thinking, he examines Vladimir Propp's Morphology of the Folktale, where narrative is segmented into a system of functions and roles. Ricœur recognises the logical elegance of this model, yet notes that it lacks telos — the arc of purpose and meaning that transforms a sequence of events into a plot. Without the tension between an initial lack and a completed whole, there is no story, only a scheme. Ricœur criticises narrative theory conceived as an abstract algebra of meaning that covertly presupposes the very human agency and intentionality it claims to exclude. Only by returning to the idea of an agent who acts and judges can we speak of narrative in the full sense. Mechanical functions must be replaced by volitional figures — suffering and acting beings — and categories such as desire, experience, success, and failure must be reintroduced. This approach restores the ethical dimension of narrative, yet still requires a principle capable of binding actions into a meaningful whole. For Ricœur, this principle is emplotment — the process that configures 'before' and 'after' into a coherent plot.

Returning to Aristotle, Ricœur demonstrates that every story enacts a movement from chaos to order, from injustice to justice. Comedy, for instance, unfolds a transition from an usurping to a legitimate social order, in which youth and love triumph over power and interest. Here ethics and plot intertwine: the action does not merely entertain but reveals a value-laden truth. In this way, Ricœur reinstates telos at the centre of narrative logic. His next step is to link emplotment to temporality. Narrative, he argues, creates a 'third time' — distinct from both physical time and inner, lived time. Within it, events are rearranged and transformed by significance: the time of what is told and the time of the telling diverge in order to generate meaning. Through compressions and dilations of chronology, a rhythm of tension and recognition emerges. Plot thus becomes an instrument of moral and cognitive movement: characters act in ignorance, while the reader, through the narrator's perspective, perceives the full arc of understanding. Novels exemplify this process — the errors and delusions of characters become pathways toward recognition and the formation of a new moral order. The telos of the story is a moral crystallisation in which understanding coincides with justice.

For Ricœur, such a configuration cannot be replaced by a set of formal rules. Narrative is not an algorithm but a mode of moral knowledge. It allows human beings to undergo transformation without real loss — to move from ignorance to insight, like the hero of tragedy or the novel. Here lies its cathartic function, akin to Aristotle's notion of purification through recognition. Narrativity thus becomes not merely a form of thought, but a laboratory of moral imagination, in which the capacities for empathy, discrimination, and judgement are exercised. Against both sterile formalism and naïve subjectivism, Ricœur proposes a synthesis: structural models provide a map of repetitions, but only emplotment confers meaning and purpose. Narrativity is a universal human competence through which time is configured into a meaningful arc of action and evaluation. It is within this 'third time' of narrative that humanity finds a path from error to understanding — and it is for this reason that no community can exist without stories.

The Semantics of Action

"Action is not an event; it is associated with motives, goals, and grounds that make it intelligible."
– Paul Ricoeur

In the fourth chapter[50] of Time and Narrative, Paul Ricœur formulates one of his key theses: narrative causality is not physical or formal, but practical — embedded in the semantics of action. A story is not simply an ordered list of occurrences, but a configuration of aims, means, and motives. Narrative makes human behaviour intelligible because life itself is already organised teleologically: actions involve intentions, choices, and consequences that confer meaning on time. This internal teleology, intrinsic to practical action, becomes the foundation of narrative. The causality of plot — the fact that one thing happens because of another — derives from the logic of human intentions, not from the laws of matter. The mechanical model that dominated modern thought after Newton conceived the world as a network of material causes and effects, in which every movement is determined by laws. Human action does not fit this frame. When a person reaches for a glass, this is not merely the outcome of muscular contraction, but the realisation of a purpose. In physics the cause is an impact; in the will it is a motive.

Narrative is, at its core, a reproduction of this chain of motives — a way of showing how choices and goals generate events. In everyday life people constantly interpret actions through such a teleological grammar. 'He left because he had decided', 'She forgave because she understood' — such constructions express not regularities, but meaningful connections. Ricœur argues that narrative does not merely describe these relations, but renders them thinkable: it is the cultural form in which human action becomes intelligible. When a story has coherence, it owes it to the presence of agents acting toward ends. Without telos there is no plot, only chronology. The semantics of action differs from psychological explanation because it does not reduce motivation to inner states, but understands it as a structure inscribed in a world of objects and rules. Action is always an intervention in that world — a way of altering its state according to a design. If someone pulls a starter cord and the engine ignites, physics can describe the motion, but not the intention that links the gesture to the result. This thread of intention, Ricœur suggests, is the prototype of narrative causality. Narrative unfolds the same pattern: an initial intention, obstacles, adjustments of means, and the attainment or failure of a goal. Telos holds together heterogeneous elements — tools, circumstances, decisions — in a single meaningful whole. In this sense, narrative is not an imitation of events, but an imitation of actions. When a character pursues a goal, changes strategies, takes risks, and bears consequences, the plot reproduces the structure of human practice. Temporality is internal to this process: action unfolds in time marked by before and after, by expectation and fulfilment. Plot does not merely describe time; it configures it as tension between intention and outcome. Every story is a movement through the time of the will.

Ricœur extends this logic to historical narratives, where not only individuals but collective subjects act. Nations, institutions, and communities function as 'quasi-characters' that pursue goals and make decisions. These collectives are not fictions, but real formations of the social world, unified by shared beliefs and roles. When one says that 'the state declared war' or 'the city rose in protest', this is not metaphor but a mode of practical understanding: the actions of many are grasped as the purposive act of a community. In this way historical narratives reproduce the teleological structure of collective action. At the same time, Ricœur emphasises that narrative causality remains open to correction. While fictional narratives construct their own worlds, history remains accountable to evidence. It can be challenged by new facts, yet even

[50] Ricoeur, P. (1983) Time and Narrative, Vol. 1. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

refutation takes the form of another narrative that reconfigures motives and actions. Truth and deception, success and failure, are semantic elements that can be rearranged but never removed from narrative form.

Narrative thus remains the most adequate way of understanding the human world, in which actions are ordered not by laws but by intentions. Ultimately, the 'semantics of action' shows that narrative causality is the causality of practice unfolded in time. Stories elevate the everyday logic of human 'because' — the logic of goals and choices — into a cultural form that renders experience intelligible. History is narrated will: the chain of intentions, adjustments, and consequences that links human beings to the world. For this reason, plot is not a physical mechanism but an art of purposive action — that which holds together events, time, and meaning. Causality reveals the threads of intention within narrative, because it is through them that discrete actions are bound into a meaningful arc that transforms occurrences into history.

The Poetics of History

"Narrative refigures temporal experience by making the present legible in light of the past and the future."
– Paul Ricoeur

'Third time', as Paul Ricœur calls it in Time and Narrative, lies at the heart of a poetics of history. It is a distinctive layer of human existence in which past, present, and future are not arranged mechanically but woven into a fabric of stories. History seeks to present a past that is no longer there, yet the way people experience time as social beings continually binds them to it. In this relation, 'narrated time' becomes the medium through which actions, projects, and memories become intelligible as stories. It is neither the astronomical time of movements and cycles nor the purely inner time of consciousness, but a cultural milieu in which the lives of individuals and communities acquire meaning through narration. This third time comes close to what Ricœur understands as human care — that tension between possibilities, choices, and finitude which renders existence meaningful. Significance precedes objectivity: the world is already laden with meaning before science transforms it into a measurable object. A rose as a gift or as a memory exists prior to the rose as a botanical fact. This primordial saturation of the world with meaning is the soil from which historical thinking grows. The past we investigate is not merely a sequence of dates but a field of projects, conflicts, and aims akin to our own.

Ricœur identifies the trace as the key figure of this relation to the past. The trace is both object and sign — wolf tracks, a broken vessel, a stone tablet, a document. Most traces were not created in order to communicate with us, yet once discovered they invite us to reconstruct the world from which they came. A stone axe or a wall painting is not merely a thing but a fragment of human activity, embedded in a network of tools and gestures — hunting, cooking, writing, burying. To understand such traces is to imagine a world of care in which other beings acted, chose, and dwelt. This is what turns understanding the past into a narrative act: every trace demands a story that situates it within a broader context.

Narrated time inhabits generations. The stories of grandparents and grandchildren do not merely transmit facts; they create a community within time itself — a sense of belonging to a chain of life and memory. In this way a 'we-relation' takes shape, linking the present to the past. Stories are therefore not secondary ornaments but a primary mechanism of temporal connection between people. They transform biographical and collective experiences into meaningful structures that provide continuity and identity. Historical knowledge arises when these personal and collective

narratives are inserted into a critical order of succession and evidence. Yet even then it never sheds its poetic character. The historian cannot be an ideal chronicler who records events moment by moment. Every description involves selection, and selection implies meaning. The past is constructed by linking events into significant sequences that presuppose beginnings, developments, and consequences. A birth becomes important because it leads to a particular life; a battle matters because it precedes a transformation. The historical sentence is always a narrative sentence: it contains a perspective that looks both forward and backward at once.

The poetics of history thus consists in a double movement between the time of the agents and the time of the narrator. For those within the event, the future is open and uncertain; for the historian who looks back from the end, it has already taken on a form of totality. Meaning emerges precisely in the tension between these two perspectives — between the contingency of lived experience and the retrospective coherence of narrative. History does not abolish contingency but integrates it into an explanation that allows us to understand actions without reducing them to necessity. When Ricœur speaks of a poetics of history, he does not mean an embellishment of facts, but a discipline of balance between action and narration, between trace and interpretation, between dates and destinies. The truth of history does not lie in repeating 'how it really was', but in articulating human time itself — that realm in which memory and expectation, action and narration, are interwoven into a living fabric. The historian is not an external observer but a continuator of this human practice of living in narrated time. History is a poetics not because it invents, but because it creates a form that renders meaning visible. Human beings live in a time they themselves narrate — and through this narration the past ceases to be lost, becoming a thread of intention that binds deeds, words, and hopes into a shared understanding of the world.

Invented Time

"Fiction gives rise to a world with its own temporality, irreducible neither to the time of the world nor to the time of consciousness."
– Paul Ricoeur

Paul Ricœur defines fiction as a world with its own temporality — not a mirror of reality, but an autonomous order in which time is created by the very act of narration. If history moves within the 'time of the world' — calendars, dates, seasons, and facts — fiction lives in the 'third time' of human storytelling. This is a time that is not measured but experienced; not discovered but forged. The sentence 'Once upon a time' does not designate a past event, but produces a world in which past, present, and future can meet within a single moment of meaning. In this sense, fictional time is invented not because it is false, but because it is generative — a form through which humans impose order on chaos and meaning on events. This capacity to invent time is inherited from the earliest myths and epics, yet in the contemporary era its most complete manifestation appears in media narratives and scenarios. Television, cinema, and digital platforms generate their own rhythms, their own 'days' and 'years', which no longer coincide with social time. Series, broadcasts, news cycles, and social media construct fictional chronologies in which the viewer does not merely observe but participates. This is time that moves not by the sun's orbit, but by the logic of drama — between anticipation and resolution, scandal and catharsis, the opening of an episode and the commercial break.

Media scenarios transform this invented temporality into a lived environment. The viewer or reader ceases to be an external observer and begins to live as a character within someone else's narrative, governed by its tempo and rhythm. News, serials, political spectacles, and reality

formats do not simply create the illusion of events; they generate a proper time in which participation, anxiety, victory, or defeat are experienced. Every ‘live’ broadcast is already part of a script in which the boundary between the present and staging dissolves. In this way, media reality does not merely produce images, but models an experience of time that becomes denser, faster, and more dramatic than everyday life. Within this fictional temporality, time no longer belongs to the world, but to the plot. Events unfold not according to natural or historical rhythms, but according to dramatic structures — climaxes, reversals, catharses. Media narratives employ these mechanisms to sustain attention and to transform waiting itself into experience. Commercial interruptions, ‘coming up next’, ‘tomorrow in the next episode’ — all maintain the tension of invented time, which does not flow but pulses. The viewer begins to live in the rhythm of the screen, to anticipate, react, and experience as a character whose everyday life is woven into a collective narrative.

Here fiction is not deception, but a structure of perception. Human beings think and feel in narrative categories because the time they experience is already narrated. Media formats give this structure a public scale: individual existence dissolves into a shared, dramatized present. The virtual space of screens produces a virtual time — a new chronology in which real events are arranged according to narrative rhythm. Scandals, wars, tragedies, and elections are perceived less as facts than as episodes in an ongoing series in which the audience recognises itself as participant. Thus media do not simply represent reality, but organise it into cycles of attention and forgetting. They ‘edit’ time, compressing and stretching the rhythms of reality, subordinating them to the logic of the stage. What history orders through causality and consequence, media order through effect and reaction. The viewer repeatedly experiences the same emotional arcs — fear, hope, outrage, catharsis — within invented chronicles that determine the tempo of everyday life.

In this sense, invented time is not merely an aesthetic phenomenon but a social dimension of contemporaneity. It allows societies to share not space but synchrony — to live within the same plot regardless of physical location. Audiences wait, suffer, and celebrate within a common ‘now’ that belongs neither to history nor to nature, but to narration. This ‘third time’ is a product of storytelling, yet also the medium in which people come to recognise themselves. Invented time, sustained by media, has become inseparable from human experience. It transforms information into destiny and participation into necessity. Between the real and the fictional, between history and script, contemporary humans live within an extended episode whose ending never arrives, because every conclusion is already the beginning of the next narrative.

Now We Are All on Stage

“All the world is not a stage, of course, but the essential ways in which it is not are not easy to point out.”
– Erving Goffman

Once, stories arrived complete, finished and packaged: books were held in the hand, films were projected on celluloid, plays were performed by actors, and audiences watched silently from the dark. Today the hall is lit, the stage has expanded, and the audience no longer sits — it performs. Media culture as a whole has turned into a global Playback Theatre: interactive, immersive, and improvisational, a live ‘playback’ in which every narrative is born, reflected, and rewritten in real time. The algorithm is the new conductor, selecting themes and tempo; the ‘actors’ are ourselves, and the stage is everywhere there is a camera and an audience. The original idea of

Playback Theatre, which emerged in the 1970s, was simple and radical: every human story deserves art, and the most honest way to honour it is to play it back — improvisationally, without rehearsal, through movement, metaphor, and song. Over time, this idea escaped the theatre and dissolved into the media environment. Today social platforms offer an endless flow of miniature performances in which people themselves tell and 'play' their lives. Every post, every vlog, every stream is a scene of improvisation where the storyteller is simultaneously protagonist and witness, and the audience responds in real time. Media narratives are no longer consumed; they are co-created. The culture of likes, stitches, duets, and reactions has transformed the viewer into a partner who participates in the performance rather than its analysis. The online world functions as an ensemble of actors constantly exchanging roles and lines, commenting, remixing, and improvising. Stories are never finished — they are retold. As in Playback Theatre, the narrative emerges from the interaction between confession and its reflection.

This culture is not merely participatory; it is immersive. In traditional Playback Theatre, actors 'enter' another person's memory to re-enact it. In media reality, we enter the lives of others through comments, reactions, and streams of shared affect. Every scroll is an invitation to complicity. Fragments of personal stories merge into a collective spectacle in which authenticity is measured not by formal mastery, but by the presence of emotion. The imperfect, the spontaneous, the unfinished become signs of sincerity. The roles of Playback Theatre today have digital incarnations. The conductor, who guides and facilitates, appears in the form of algorithms, moderators, and influencers who decide what will take the stage. The actors are all those who 'step into role' through stories, videos, or memes, translating their experience into gesture and image. The musician exists as sounds, filters, and edits that give emotional tone. The lighting designer is anyone who chooses how to present their story: with melancholy, humour, or tragic inflection. The techniques have migrated as well. The mirror — when a performer repeats another's movement to return it consciously — lives on in reaction videos that turn someone else's words into collective reflection. The double, who voices what was left unsaid, appears in quotes, remixes, and comments that say 'what they really meant is…'. Role reversal is visible in POV videos that invite the viewer to occupy another's position and feel its internal logic. Soliloquy — the monologue addressed to the audience — survives in intimate vlogs and streams where the private becomes a public experience.

Thus the entire media world behaves like an extended improvisational troupe. Every day millions of mini-scenes are played out: love, scandal, reaction, catharsis. Yet the absence of a director brings risk. In traditional Playback Theatre there is a conductor who holds the frame, sets boundaries, and helps participants step out of role. In the media version, this transition is often missing — the story is replayed again and again without sharing, without distance, without reflection. Anger is performed as anger, sorrow as content. Cycles of endless replay emerge, where the stage moves but people do not. And yet this form also carries therapeutic potential. Improvisational playback is a democratic art of response: anyone can speak and be heard. It turns spontaneity into a mode of communication and everyday life into a scene of understanding. In this new media theatre there are no fixed spectators or performers — only a circulation of roles through which people learn to see themselves through others. To live in such a culture is to recognise the theatricality of every gesture and, at the same time, the responsibility it entails. If we are all on stage, then the task is no longer to perform better, but to listen more deeply. In the immersive world of media 'playback', improvisation can become a form of care: a way to see one another, to understand, and to share a common time that is not recorded on tape, but unfolds in real presence — here and now.

The Abduction of Attention

"Attention is the rarest and purest form of generosity."
— Simone Weil

'All of life is a distraction,' Woody Allen once remarked — and behind the joke lies one of humanity's oldest intuitions. The abduction of attention is not merely a matter of distraction; it is a fundamental dramaturgical principle: a way of directing focus, of controlling what feels significant. The actor on stage does not fight the spectator's distraction but leads it — offering light, gesture, and pause that momentarily switch off the outside world and concentrate energy in a single place, a single line, a single gaze. In that moment, attention becomes plot. To abduct attention is to model reality. Ancient theatre already understood that art is not simply representation, but the management of perception. The orchestra, the chorus, the tragic mask — all were designed to guide the gaze, to conceal and to reveal. The abduction of attention is inseparable from acting itself: the performer does not merely 'execute' but hides the very process of execution, turning it into an illusion of presence. People come to the theatre in order to have their attention diverted from ordinary time — to be immersed in another time, condensed and ordered. In this sense, the stage is the first school of distraction: it teaches how to forget oneself while simultaneously discovering another, more meaningful 'here and now'. At a deeper psychological level, distraction is an act of freedom. It allows the human being to step away from constant awareness of limitation — time, mortality, routine. Stories, tasks, projects, and games are theatrical forms of distraction through which life acquires a stage and existence a rhythm. The gravediggers' laughter in Hamlet, the pause between acts, the relief after catharsis — all are profound exercises in redirecting attention, in temporary forgetting that makes existence bearable.

Contemporary culture has merely expanded this scenic logic. Today, the abduction of attention has become an economy, an infrastructure of experience. Online media, social platforms, and streaming formats apply the same theatrical laws that once governed the stage. They are directors of our focus, screenwriters of our sense of importance. Algorithms are the new prompters, feeding the next line so that attention does not collapse. Media scenarios unfold endless interactive dramas — political, emotional, commercial — that abduct attention toward new conflicts, new heroes, new 'rescue missions'. Online space is no longer neutral; it is a theatrical machine in which every message competes for stage time. Feeds, notifications, and recommendations function like a lighting desk: intensifying one element, dimming another, producing a sense of constant motion that demands to be followed. In this perpetual shifting of spotlights, attention becomes capital, and the spectator becomes an actor who must sustain their own visibility in order to remain part of the performance.

Media narratives use abduction not only as a technique but as a structural principle. Each day, news and scandals rewrite the drama of society so that the audience always has something to follow. Crises are arranged like acts; heroes and villains rotate according to ratings; moral catharsis is brief, because the next plot is already waiting in rehearsal. Attention is thus kept in continuous tension between fear and hope, guilt and relief — a classical theatrical cycle, but without a final curtain call.

The paradox is that contemporary human life unfolds as a permanent drama of attention. Every moment becomes a choice among dozens of scenes: which screen to watch, which signal to answer, which story to enter. This is a new form of acting in which everyone is both performer and audience at once. The digital world does not merely abduct attention — it fragments, rehearses, and directs it. The ability to concentrate, to create one's own scenic focus, becomes a form of self-preservation. Just as the actor manages stage energy through gesture, voice, and

silence, so the individual in the media age must learn to manage attention — to direct and protect it, to choose which narratives to enter and which to remain outside as a spectator.
The abduction of attention is not only a danger but also a possibility. It reveals attention as power, shows that every act of seeing is an act of creation. Media, like theatre, live off the illusion that whatever stands at the centre of the stage is what matters most. But a mature culture begins when one realises that the spotlight can be moved — that attention is an instrument, not a foreign authority. True freedom is not endless distraction, but the capacity to decide where and why to look. In a world where the abduction of attention has become the dominant script, the act of conscious focus is the new form of dramatic mastery.

Alienation 2.0

"Alienation is a process in which a person gradually ceases to possess his own powers, feelings, and thoughts. They begin to live outside of him, to oppose him, to obsess him."
– Tsvetan Stoyanov

In his book[51] Ideas and Motifs of Alienation in Western Literature, Tsvetan Stoyanov describes alienation as a constant companion of modernity—a condition in which human beings remain alone among their own creations. Today this diagnosis sounds more актyal than ever. With the rise of online media, alienation has not disappeared; it has merely changed its appearance. It is no longer silence between people, but noise—a continuous flow of words, images, and reactions that creates the illusion of communication. Never before have there been so many connections, and never so few encounters.
In the networked world, the individual is not isolated but constantly drawn in. Each day unfolds through dozens of micro-scenes—chats, comments, videos, news. Algorithms arrange this world as an endless spectacle in which everyone plays a role: spectator, actor, author, extra. Yet the more one steps onto the stage, the less one possesses one's own voice. Lines are prewritten—template reactions, emojis, stock phrases, quotations, clichés. Conversation turns into a script written by no one and performed by everyone. In this media script the individual is more active than ever and at the same time more alienated from the other. Communication is reduced to the exchange of rapid signals, without pause, without silence, without the risk of misunderstanding. The absence of silence flattens dialogue. Everyone responds instantly, but rarely listens. Attention shifts from meaning to visibility—who spoke, how often, how many 'likes' were received. Communication ceases to be an exchange of sense and becomes a measurement of presence.
Online space has produced a new type of human being—an actor without a stage and a public without distance. Always 'online', perpetually ready to react, comment, perform. This constant readiness is a form of labour—emotional, cognitive, scenic. Every message is a rehearsal; every post a performance. Beneath this activity lies weightlessness: words lose gravity because they are fired into a stream that does not remember. This is what makes contemporary alienation deeper—it no longer arises from silence but from excessive talk. On mass platforms, dialogue is replaced by synchronous monologuing. Everyone speaks before a mirror, and others respond with reflections. Comments line up like sounds in an endless chorus in which no one distinguishes another's voice. Even disagreement is preformatted: polarisation is part of the

[51] Stoyanov, Tsvetan (1967) Ideas and Motives of Alienation in Western Literature. Volume 1.

mechanism that holds attention. Conflict, which in lived life can generate meaning, is transformed into a commodity—a spectacle of difference without consequence.
The alienation Stoyanov analysed emerged from industrial production and depersonalised labour. 'Alienation 2.0' arises from content production and depersonalised communication. Instead of a factory of goods—a factory of opinions; instead of the alienated worker—the alienated participant. On social networks the individual is simultaneously product and producer, consumer and raw material. One publishes in order to be seen, and being seen replaces connection. This constant visibility generates a new kind of loneliness—public, measurable, shared. Contemporary communication unfolds in an environment that demands uninterrupted activity. Every pause is perceived as absence, every silence as disappearance. From this emerges a new anxiety: the fear of not being seen, of not being included in the conversation, of falling out of the rhythm of the stream. The networked subject lives in permanent tension between self and role, between words and their statistics. In this sense online communication does not liberate from alienation but institutionalises it—turns it into a condition of belonging. Media scripts sustain this dependency through continuous interactivity. The algorithm is the director who knows what will hold attention, when to cut the scene and when to cue the next one. The spectator becomes a co-author, but only insofar as they follow the rules of the spectacle: short text, strong emotion, immediate effect. The more active one is, the better one serves the system. Freedom of speech turns into an obligation to react; spontaneity into automatism.
The paradox of 'Alienation 2.0' is that one participates constantly but is present nowhere. Connected to thousands, yet knowing no one. The stage is everywhere, meaning nowhere. This hyper-connectedness is the new form of solitude: total inclusion without genuine communion. Stoyanov warns that Western culture moves in cycles between closeness and isolation. In our time this cycle spins so fast that the boundary between them dissolves—communication and alienation merge into one. Genuine human connection today begins with a refusal of the role. Where one dares not to perform, not to react automatically, to wait and to listen—there alienation momentarily recedes. But the network does not love pauses; it lives from the movement of attention. And yet, if there is any chance of freedom, it lies precisely in this pause—in the space between lines, where not the algorithm but the human being decides when to speak and when to remain silent. As Tsvetan Stoyanov writes, 'the most frightening form of alienation is not silence, but speech that reaches no one. The world can be full of sounds and still empty of human presence.'

Communism Is Forever

"The system became so stable and normalized that even those who no longer believed in it continued to implement it as if they did."
– Alexey Yurchak

In the book[52] Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More: The Last Soviet Generation (2006), Alexei Yurchak introduces the concept of 'hypernormalisation'—a condition in which a system becomes so fully normalised that even its obvious absurdity is perceived as natural. People no longer believe in the official ideology, yet they continue to repeat it out of habit; not because they are deceived, but because there is no language outside it. Hypernormalised reality

[52] Alexei Yurchak (2006). Everything was forever, until it was no more : the last Soviet generation. Princeton, Nj: Princeton University Press.

is a world in which words cease to signify, yet continue to function—as ritual, as performance, as a self-sustaining form.

Today this logic has migrated from late socialism into the media culture of the digital West. After the collapse of grand ideologies, the place of the Party has been taken by networks, and the role of propaganda by algorithms. The media narrative does not demand belief, but participation. One does not need to believe in it; it is enough to be 'inside'. Endless scrolling, likes, reactions and comments maintain a sense of life, of 'here and now', while content dissolves into a stream of repetition. The world appears dynamic, yet is in fact frozen in motion—without beginning, without end, without perspective. Thus a new form of time emerges: 'media time', which does not flow but circulates. News is constantly updated, yet rarely transformed; crises come and go without consequence. The present is endlessly reset as a perpetual 'now', in which past and future collapse into a cycle of urgencies and forgettings. This is the 'eternal today' of the contemporary subject—a reflection of the Soviet 'everything is forever', but now without ideology, only interface. The difference is that the communist myth of eternity was institutional, whereas today's is medial—produced by users themselves, who sustain the illusion through continuous activity.

The hypernormalisation of the media narrative rests on a feeling of total transparency. Everything is accessible, everything is commented on, everything is visible. Yet visibility does not lead to understanding—it replaces it. Just as in late socialism language lost its bond with meaning, today information loses its bond with reality. Society does not believe that the news is true, but consumes it ritually—because it is part of the daily rhythm, of the social script. Truth is secondary; what matters is that there is a flow, participation, screens. In this environment the individual is simultaneously citizen and actor, spectator and product. One does not merely read the news, but reproduces it, comments on it, shares it, 'performs' within it. The media stage turns everyone into a micro-replica of power—a participant in the ritual of presence. Yet behind this activity lies a deep alienation. Communication is reduced to automatic exchanges of lines, to banal acting in which everyone follows a script without an author. This is the hypernormalised communication of the digital world: everyone speaks, no one listens, and meaning evaporates into acoustic noise. Like late communism, the contemporary West lives in 'doublespeak'—public and private, but now without a clear boundary between them. The official discourse is that of the media—correct, positive, endlessly refreshed. The private one appears in comments, sarcasm, memes—an unofficial cynicism that sustains the feeling of personal autonomy. The two feed one another: irony sustains seriousness, seriousness sustains irony. As in the late USSR, everyone 'knows perfectly well' that the spectacle is a fiction, yet no one withdraws from participation, because outside it there is no stage.

This new reality has no centre, and no exit. If under socialism 'the West' functioned as an imaginary salvation, today even this imaginary 'outside' has disappeared. The network has no borders—it encompasses the planet. There is nowhere to escape 'to the West', because the West itself has become a network: global, self-sustaining, without alternative. Escape is only internal—refusal to participate, withdrawal, silence—but even this is immediately transformed into a pose, into content, into a new role. Yurchak shows how Soviet 'eternity' collapsed instantly, because it was sustained by form rather than belief. Today's media eternity is just as fragile—it rests on the rhythm of attention. If the flow stops, if people cease to react, the system disintegrates. But it will not stop: unlike the communist utopia, media reality promises no future—it promises an endless 'now'. As Alexei Yurchak writes, 'late socialism produced a sense of endless present—a time that was always the same, self-reproducing, without a clear past or future horizon'. The hypernormalised media narrative turns life into a continuous simulation of change, in which everything is updated yet nothing is transformed. And just as the Soviet

subject once lived in the 'eternity' of a tomorrow that never arrived, so today's subject lives in the 'eternity' of a now that never ends. 'Communism is forever' is no longer an ideological slogan, but a cultural principle.

Marketing Narratives

"People don't buy products or services. They buy the meanings those products or services bring to their lives."
– Robert McKee

When Robert McKee—the world's most famous teacher of screenwriting—turned his attention from Hollywood to Wall Street, the boundary between art and economics effectively disappeared. In Storynomics: Story-Driven Marketing in the Post-Advertising World[53] (2018), McKee advances a radical thesis: in an age in which people no longer trust advertising, the only effective way to persuade is through story. The writer who trained filmmakers to create fictional worlds now teaches corporations how to construct persuasive narratives within the real world of the market. This shift is not merely a change in marketing technique; it is a symptom of a deeper cultural transformation—the passage from an age of facts to an age of narrative. McKee begins with a simple observation: traditional advertising has lost its power because audiences no longer believe its messages. Decades of manipulation, clichés and pseudo-scientific 'proofs' have turned consumers into sceptics. They recognise falsehood, block ads, mock them, and refuse to remain a passive audience. In a world of informational excess, the only thing that holds attention is meaning. And meaning, McKee argues, is always produced by story.

In *Storynomics*, he applies the laws of dramaturgy to the economy. The corporation should no longer sell a product, but tell a story in which the customer is the protagonist. The problem becomes the antagonist, and the brand the mentor who guides the hero towards transformation. The purchase is the final act of catharsis. Business thus becomes a staged drama, in which success depends not on data but on conflict, tension and change. The appeal of this idea lies in its reintroduction of the human element into economic relations. McKee insists that persuasion has never flowed from argument, but from experience. True marketing does not describe a product; it creates an emotional structure through which the audience feels its meaning. The story does not say 'buy', but 'understand'. In an era in which attention is the scarcest resource, narrative becomes currency.

Yet this shift carries a risk. Transferring narrative from art into business means that forms of emotional influence developed for aesthetic experience are now deployed for commercial ends. A corporation that masters storytelling acquires the power of an author: it does not merely communicate, it shapes perception, experience and identity. The consumer becomes a character in a script they did not write. This is marketing as the direction of human desire. McKee proposes an alternative to deception, but this too can become a new mask. If advertising once sold illusion, today it sells authenticity. Companies compete to appear 'real', 'honest' and 'caring'. This staged realism is the new form of trust: not simply to deceive the customer, but to convince them that they are not being deceived. Story becomes an instrument of sincerity—and sincerity, once turned into strategy, loses its moral ground. McKee believes the solution lies in intention. A brand's story should express not a product, but a value. His examples—Patagonia,

[53] Mckee, R. and Gerace, T. (2018). Storynomics : story-driven marketing in the post-advertising world. New York: Twelve, March.

Dove, Tesla—are companies that transform ideas into narratives of humanity, sustainability or innovation. Yet the line between inspiration and manipulation remains thin. The better the story is told, the more easily it is accepted as truth. Narrative form itself carries trust: plot, transformation and catharsis create an illusion of authenticity. Here the paradox becomes visible. McKee is the man who spent decades teaching writers how to invent plausible lies. Now he teaches corporations how to invent plausible truths. The difference lies only in purpose: one is aesthetic, the other economic. Both, however, operate through control of attention, rhythm and emotion. In this way, artistic form itself becomes a technology of persuasion.

At its best, *Storynomics* can humanise marketing. McKee calls for a moral turn: the story must be honest, coherent and oriented towards real change. In a world in which words are devalued, a genuine story can restore meaning. At its worst, however, 'storinomics' legitimises a new form of manipulation—more elusive precisely because it works through emotional proximity. McKee is right that people are not moved by facts, but by meanings. For that very reason, narrative is a dangerous instrument in the hands of markets. Story, once a means of understanding, becomes a means of selling. And in the world of marketing narratives, authenticity is no longer a moral virtue, but a competitive advantage. Ultimately, *Storynomics* is not merely a book about advertising, but a chronicle of the transition from an economy of products to an economy of meanings. In this new reality, every brand is an author, every purchase a narrative ending, every act of attention capital. McKee, perhaps unintentionally, captures the deepest irony of our time: when everything is narrated, life itself begins to sound like a script—well structured, emotionally effective, and endlessly marketable.

Strategic Communication?

"Those who manipulate the invisible mechanisms of society form an invisible government, which is the real ruling power in our country."
– Edward Bernays

The terms 'propaganda', 'PR (public relations)', 'public relations' and 'strategic communication' describe the same field: the management of public opinion. They claim different moral statuses, yet the practices behind them often overlap. Propaganda promises a cause, public relations promise transparency, strategic communication promises a scientific approach. All of them, however, rely on similar techniques: narrative construction, control of attention, and the manipulation of perception through carefully selected images and words. The difference between them is a matter of context and labelling rather than of substance. After the Second World War, Edward Bernays[54] – Freud's nephew and the founder of modern public relations – replaced the word 'propaganda' with 'public relations' in order to cleanse it of its negative connotations. Thus a new profession was born, one that claimed not to manipulate but to build trust between institutions and citizens. In principle, public relations was supposed to be a two-way process: the organisation listens, adapts, and responds. Yet Bernays himself openly acknowledged that the task of the PR professional is to 'engineer consent' – to steer public opinion in such a way that it appears voluntary. Today's 'strategic communication consultants' merely continue this line, using new instruments and operating under a more scientific-sounding name.

Strategic communication promises transparency and ethics, but in practice it often employs the same mechanisms as propaganda: carefully constructed media scenarios, repetition of key

[54] Bernays, E. L. (1928) Propaganda. New York: H. Liveright.

messages, control of the agenda, and selective presentation of information. The goal is not simply to inform, but to direct the thinking and emotions of the audience in a predetermined direction. This form of persuasion operates through the structure of storytelling: it creates heroes and antagonists, promises catharsis, and formulates the ‘correct’ point of view. In this way, the PR campaign becomes a scenario in which the audience has a role but no control over the plot. Officially, the difference between public relations, strategic communication and propaganda lies in the transparency of intention. Strategic communication presents itself as persuasion with trust; propaganda as persuasion without trust. In reality, however, even the most transparent campaigns can be manipulative when the media environment lacks independent regulation. In an economy where attention is the most valuable resource, every organisation is tempted to maintain a scenario that reinforces its own interest. And when the media participate in that scenario, the boundary between information and suggestion dissolves entirely.

Public relations, strategic communication and propaganda share the same dramaturgy – a three-act structure: the creation of trust, the mobilisation of emotions, and the maintenance of control. The difference lies in tone rather than in method. PR campaigns use positive language and moral legitimacy, while propaganda relies on fear and division. Yet both model public behaviour through manipulated images of reality. From corporate messages about ‘sustainability’ to political slogans about ‘national unity’, media scenarios manufacture consent that appears voluntary but is in fact directed. In the digital age, this simulation becomes even harder to detect. Social networks enable personalised propaganda: micro-campaigns tailored to each user according to their profile. Algorithms calculate the weaknesses of attention and exploit them, while communication itself appears dialogical. ‘Strategic communication’ here turns into automated PR: every interaction is calculated, every reaction recorded and fed back into the system. Without an ethical framework, this form of persuasion can evolve into a tool of control, where the audience is no longer a citizen but a statistical measure of behaviour.

The problem is not persuasion itself, but the lack of accountability. Without clear regulation, any communication strategy can turn into propaganda. When governments, corporations, or even non-governmental organisations control the public narrative by staging media content, society loses its capacity for critical thinking. The history of the twentieth century demonstrates how easily good intentions degenerate when the language of communication becomes a language of governance. The ethical difference between public relations, strategic communication and propaganda should not be measured by words, but by the possibility of feedback. When society can ask questions, challenge narratives, choose and refuse participation, communication is legitimate. When it is one-directional, when it replaces dialogue with spectacle and critical thought with emotional reflex, it is already propaganda, regardless of its name. The formula ‘the difference lies in the transparency of intention’ therefore sounds convincing only in theory. In practice, words often conceal the same scenarios of persuasion which, without ethical and legal regulation, can have destructive consequences – from the manipulation of elections to the artificial division of societies. The real boundary between strategic communication and propaganda does not run through vocabulary, but through the ability of citizens to recognise the scenario that governs them. Strategic communication employs ‘strategems’ – from the ancient Greek strategēma, meaning a military ruse. These are scenarios of the future into which the masses are voluntarily drawn through persuasion and media mobilisation.

Democratic Propaganda

"The logic is clear — propaganda is to a democracy what the bludgeon is to a totalitarian state."
– Noam Chomsky

In democracies, propaganda does not disappear – it merely refines its language. Today it is called 'strategic communication', 'information operations', or 'public diplomacy'. The vocabulary changes, but the project remains the same: a controlled storyline is constructed and embedded within the media ecosystem in order to steer public attitudes at home and abroad. Democracy, which prides itself on transparency, proves to be the most effective environment for imperceptible propaganda, precisely because it does not impose it from outside but introduces it from within – through the language of trust, consent, and media form.

After 11 September 2001, strategic communication became a central instrument of Western military and diplomatic operations. In Iraq, Afghanistan, and Syria, narrative itself became part of the weaponry. The British PR industry, renowned for its skill in shaping public image, began servicing battlefields. In Iraq, agencies such as Bell Pottinger[55] developed materials covering the full spectrum of information warfare – from 'white' content with open authorship to 'grey' and 'black' productions presented as local media or enemy messages. Some of these materials imitated independent news, while others were designed to track their viewers through embedded web markers. Media thus became sensors, and communication a means of intelligence gathering and control. This model was further refined in Syria[56], where teams funded by the British Foreign Office built 'brands' for opposition groups, trained spokespersons, and produced video content designed to appear as spontaneous voices of local fighters. The material circulated in Arab media without visible traces of Western involvement. The justification was pragmatic: when the enemy fights with narratives, democracy must have its own. Yet this logic blurs the boundary between journalism and psychological operation. When the 'news' is staged, the viewer can no longer distinguish the informer from the manipulator.

Democratic propaganda is distinguished not by the absence of falsehood, but by the elegance of its form. It does not ban opinions; it redirects flows of attention. It does not suppress information; it rearranges it in ways that produce trust. It uses PR techniques, storytelling, and visual authenticity to generate a sense of participation. Every story is subordinated to a predefined strategic message, and the audience becomes part of a scenario it does not realise it is performing. This is the new form of propaganda: not enforced by coercion, but voluntarily shared. Advocates of strategic communication argue that in an age of terrorism and disinformation, 'communication defence' is no less important than military defence. They claim that when democracies remain silent, autocrats and extremists fill the space with their own messages. On this basis, every campaign – from clarifying humanitarian corridors to delegitimising violence – can be justified as life-saving. Critics, however, warn that when democracy conceals its authorship, it undermines its own moral foundation. The problem is not persuasion itself, but the lack of accountability. Narrative warfare is difficult to subject to democratic oversight. Funding is classified, contracts pass through intermediaries, and products circulate without signatures. This makes democratic states increasingly suspect in the eyes of their own citizens. When hidden

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[55] The Bureau of Investigative Journalism (en-GB). (n.d.). Fake news and false flags. [online] Available at: https://www.thebureauinvestigates.com/stories/2016-10-02/fake-news-and-false-flags-how-the-pentagon-paid-a-british-pr-firm-500m-for-top-secret-iraq-propaganda.

[56] Cobain, I., Ross, A., Evans, R. and Mahmood, M. (2016). How Britain funds the 'propaganda war' against Isis in Syria. The Guardian. [online] 3 May. Available at: https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/may/03/how-britain-funds-the-propaganda-war-against-isis-in-syria

campaigns are exposed, the effect is reversed: distrust in the media, in institutions, and in the very language of 'official truth'.
Technology has transformed this practice into an industry. Social media algorithms enable micro-targeting and personalised messages that appear organic but are carefully staged. 'Authenticity' is tested as a product, emotions are modelled through data, and public reactions are observed like laboratory experiments. Democracy persuades itself through its own tools – the free circulation of information becomes a channel for strategic management. This is the paradox of 'democratic propaganda': it seeks to defend freedom through the management of perception. But when control over narrative becomes more important than truth, democracy begins to adopt the very forms of the systems it opposes. The scenarios of strategic communication increasingly resemble scenarios of war, in which words are weapons and citizens are media soldiers. Today, however, truth is no longer part of the equation. The era of post-truth has arrived, in which lies and manipulation not only function but are rewarded. No one looks back to investigate organised falsehoods and media black propaganda; attention moves forward, towards the next wave of stories. Facts disintegrate, while spectacle remains. In this new environment, democratic propaganda has reached perfection: it no longer hides, because no one is looking for it.

Strategic Scenarios

"Scenarios are not predictions; they are tools for thinking about the future, designed to help decision-makers prepare for different strategic options."
– Herman Kahn

Once, institutions were candid about their aims – to persuade, to educate, or to manipulate. The language was explicit: propaganda in war, manipulation in politics, 'publicity' in business. Over time the words softened, but the essence remained unchanged – every purposeful communication seeks to produce an effect and to induce behaviour. Today this craft bears the more euphonious name 'strategic communication'. When viewed as a scenario, the analogy becomes obvious: there is an intention (a mission), characters (audiences), scenes (campaigns), props (channels and messages), direction (timing and sequencing of actions), and a final shot in which the audience performs the desired action.
The historical vocabulary reveals a change in form, but not in substance. Indoctrination implied the saturation of a closed informational space with a single truth. Manipulation emphasised the inequality between the knowing and the ignorant. Propaganda industrialised these practices, turning the media into a weapon of state will for mobilisation, control, and suggestion. Over time they were renamed: 'public information', 'public relations', 'integrated marketing communications'. All these forms converged into the discipline of strategic communication – the planned arrangement of words, images, and actions so that selected audiences adopt particular meanings and act accordingly.
The communicator today thinks like a screenwriter. Every strategy begins with a logline – a concise sentence defining the mission: whose behaviour must change, in what way, and why. From there, characters and scenes are constructed – the different audiences and the contexts in which they encounter the message. Each group has its own drama: fears, desires, and goals that must be understood and translated into action. The plot follows a classical three-act structure: awareness, persuasion, and action. First the problem is presented, then the argument or conflict is articulated, and finally comes the resolution – the call to action, designed to appear logical and voluntary. Technology has transformed this dramaturgical framework into a global spectacle.

Where propaganda once told a single story to everyone, strategic communication now builds countless micro-narratives, targeted at different audiences and updated in real time. Algorithms and social media generate hundreds of variations of the same message – each tested, edited, and reassembled according to audience response. The script is thus written continuously: A/B tests replace the editing table, and user reactions replace the cinema hall.

The ethical problem remains at the centre of the craft. Renaming propaganda as strategic communication does not eliminate the moral question. If the goal is behavioural change, the means matter. Emotional storytelling can inspire, but it can also manipulate. 'Framing' can organise information clearly, but it can also steer it in ways that bypass critical thinking. Communication, like cinema, always places the viewer within the frame, but does not always reveal the camera. The responsibility of the screenwriter – or the strategic communicator – is not only to achieve effect, but to be aware of its consequences. Transparency and consistency between words and deeds constitute the moral equivalent of an honest contract with the audience.

In government and defence, the stakes are even higher. There, strategic communication coordinates diplomacy, crisis messaging, and information operations. The guiding principle is synchronisation between words, images, and actions, because contradictory messages destroy trust. In business and civil society the logic is similar: for investors – a drama; for employees – a series; for customers – a romantic comedy; for regulators – a thriller. Integrated communications function as a 'showrunner', maintaining a single world with multiple plotlines. Consistency generates trust, and trust is capital that can be spent in times of crisis. Tactics are the craft of individual scenes. Core techniques include the contrast between 'before' and 'after', analogy that renders the unfamiliar familiar, example that humanises the idea, and repetition that builds memory. Visual language, composition, and rhythm reinforce verbal suggestion. Monitoring tracks audience reactions – as a director observes a screening. If a scene does not work, it is rewritten. Sometimes the solution is not more words, but a new action – a concession, an apology, or a change in policy.

The history of terminology thus comes full circle. Indoctrination presumed a captive audience, manipulation an inequality of knowledge, propaganda mass submission. Strategic communication acknowledges that there are now multiple storytellers and that attention is not imposed but earned. Its aim remains the same – to guide actions and beliefs – but within a new context of competing truths. 'Strategic' here does not mean planning alone, but the construction of a moral framework around objectives. The true screenwriter respects the audience. They make it a co-author, not an object. The most successful scene is not the one in which the character repeats a line, but the one in which the decision makes sense to the character themselves. Effective communication is not pressure, but shared choice. In this way, the strategic scenario becomes not merely an instrument of influence, but an art of persuading with integrity – of creating a narrative that withstands criticism, invites consent, and leads people along a common path.

Scenario Narratives

"The goal of scenario planning is to make the future thinkable. By telling stories about what might happen, we shape people's ideas about what is possible and desirable."
– Peter Schwartz

Scenarios of the future are the new form of strategic communication – narrative models through which institutions, foundations, and corporations project possible crises and solutions in order to

construct a framework for a manageable future. They appear as forecasts, but function as scenarios in the theatre of politics: they combine assumptions, moral choices, and staged audience reactions. One of the most well-known examples is the scenario[57] 'Scenarios for the Future of Technology and International Development', published in 2010 by an international foundation, which described a 'possible pandemic' in 2012 – an event in which the world experiences a global viral crisis followed by 'stricter state control, limited innovation, and civil unrest'. The text, included in the section 'Scenario Narratives: Lock Step', proved disturbingly close to the real events and lockdowns a decade later. Presented as a thought experiment, the document describes a pandemic in which states close borders, societies are disciplined through constant surveillance, and people voluntarily relinquish part of their freedoms in the name of security. Mandatory masks, temperature checks, biometric identifiers, and digital passes emerge. Many citizens welcome these measures, seeing them as a means of preserving stability. Thus, from a temporary state of emergency, a new normality is born, in which centralised power is presented as a rational response to chaos.

In this sense, strategic scenarios are not merely predictions, but pre-written narratives that shape the perception of the future. They do not foresee; they prescribe. They outline what will be considered probable, what will be accepted as inevitable, and what will appear as the correct response. When such a scenario materialises, people recognise the familiar structure and follow its rhythm – like actors who have already rehearsed the scene. In the age of information networks, these narratives become instruments for managing attention. They operate through the language of 'technological development', 'sustainability', and 'global health', but behind them lies the logic of strategic communication – a carefully constructed story that shapes behaviour. In the case of the pandemic scenario, audiences around the world were prepared to recognise the need for 'stronger control' and 'greater coordination'. Reality, when it arrived, simply filled the ready-made template.

Here lies both the power and the danger of such texts. On the one hand, they provide a space for thinking and preventive preparation – a way to examine possible crises and responses. On the other, they function as self-fulfilling prophecies. Once the idea is introduced that security requires voluntary surveillance, society has already taken the first step towards consent. In the public imagination, the future becomes a finished script, and freedom a part of the stage design. Scenarios of the future employ the same dramaturgical devices long mastered by marketing. Each contains an inciting event (a catastrophe or discovery), a conflict (the tension between freedom and security), and a resolution (a new order accepted as necessity). The visual language of the media completes the scene: images of empty streets, masked faces, heroic doctors, faceless algorithms. Reality overlays the prediction, and the audience no longer distinguishes between scenario and actuality.

Such narratives are not necessarily conspiracies, but they represent a form of political imagination transformed into a tool of governance. They legitimise future policies through the language of 'analysis' and 'preparedness'. The documents are public, but their effect is hidden: they normalise the idea that freedom is reversible, that crisis justifies centralisation, and that order can be imposed through fear. In this respect, the 2010 pandemic scenario can be read as a classic example of strategic communication on a global scale. It does not persuade directly; it prepares the ground for acceptance. Every word is carefully calibrated between anxiety and reason, between catastrophe and order. The reader does not feel manipulation, but necessity. Thus, the 'fantasy' of control gradually becomes a new standard of rationality.

[57] Scenarios for the Future of Technology and International Development. (n.d.). Available at: https://www.nommeraadio.ee/meedia/pdf/RRS/Rockefeller%20Foundation.pdf.

After the crisis, the typical consequences foreseen in the scenario also appear – biometric systems, digital passports, restricted access to public spaces, and the growing power of technological corporations. There is no need for conspiracy when the scenario has already become a cultural logic. Preventive imagination has turned into public expectation. Strategic scenarios today are part of the new language of the governable world. They replace open political debate with staged anticipation, in which the boundary between foresight and suggestion is erased. And as in any good film, the audience is hypnotised not by truth, but by the continuity of the shots. In a world where facts are already perceived through narratives, the scenario of the future becomes the most powerful form of power – the power to write the plot in which everyone participates voluntarily.

3.3. Role-playing games

Civilisation Is a Game

"In our society, the individual presents himself to others as an actor presents a character on stage."
– Erving Goffman

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, the sense that the world is turning into a role-playing game is no longer a metaphor but a cultural experience. People live within predefined roles, rules, and scenarios that simultaneously sustain social order and constrain imagination. Detachment from the depth of human experience – from darkness, uncertainty, and mystery – makes participation in destructive processes easier, including the ecological crisis. In the twenty-first century, politics and public culture generate a feeling of disintegration and theatricality in which privileged groups are forced to confront what the vulnerable have long known: there is no place left for the pretence that 'everything is fine'. Civilisation as a game designates a world in which social reality functions as a selection of roles, and human participation is pre-scripted.
The fictional world of Live Action Role Playing – LARP – offers a remarkably precise framework for understanding contemporary media culture. In classical LARP, participants construct a fictional world which they enter through masks, stories, and rules. They agree upon a shared reality that is not true but is a game, and yet it generates real emotions and actions. The media operate in the same way. Modern media narratives do not reflect life; they construct game-like structures – levels, missions, conflicts, symbolic rewards – in which audiences participate with their expectations and desires. Media scenarios become game interfaces that do not merely transmit information but draw people in, provoke them, attune them, and shape behavioural patterns. It has long been clear that social roles function as masks. Erving Goffman already emphasised the theatrical nature of social interaction, but in the digital age this theatricality mutates into playfulness. Social networks function as permanent role-platforms: every action is a move, every opinion a position within the game, every identity an avatar with specific powers, symbols, and resources. This structure migrates into journalism, political speech, and public debate, where events are no longer presented as facts but as dramaturgical episodes in an ongoing media LARP. Every crisis becomes a narrative arc; every statement a ritualised move; every news item a 'quest' that demands reaction, a like, outrage, or support. The narratives constructed by the media increasingly resemble games. They offer clearly defined roles: victim, villain, hero, expert, executioner, saviour. The schemes are familiar and predictable, designed to

retain attention, concentrate emotion, and mobilise participation. But this gamification is not innocent. It reproduces a politics of fictionality in which truth is replaced by the continuity of narrative moves. The world is told through structures that resemble game mechanics: resetting context, rewarding loyalty, penalising deviation, endlessly escalating conflict. In this way, media scenarios do not merely describe reality; they reshape it according to the rhythm of the game.

This playful logic also reshapes identity itself. People are trained to think of themselves as characters: professional roles, digital profiles, political positions. Each of these roles comes with a predefined script, and the media provide a constant flow of models for how that role should be 'played'. The paradox is that this role-based existence, rather than expanding possibilities, often narrows them: authenticity becomes a script, and freedom a sequence of reactive actions in response to media plots. This is a culture in which mask and face become increasingly difficult to distinguish. The most significant effect of LARP logic on the media, however, is the transformation of how participation is understood. Citizens no longer wish merely to observe; they want to play. The media respond by turning news into interactive dramaturgies: comments, live streams, 'viral' narratives in which the viewer feels that their reaction is a meaningful part of the process. This model transforms journalism from narration into scenarisation: attention becomes a resource, emotion a tool, and stories a game that adapts to audience desires. The effect is double. On the one hand, the sense of participation intensifies. On the other, the impression grows that the world is a fiction that can be reshaped according to the dramaturgical needs of the moment.

The media game is not simply a reflection of cultural dynamics; it accelerates them. Through the constant production of roles and plots, the media shape the social imagination as a space in which reality is experienced as a scenario, and the scenario as reality. In this world, every crisis, every campaign, every cause is a dramaturgical construct that must be 'played', not merely understood. The ludic character of culture is not a peripheral feature of the new century; it is its fundamental grammar.

We Are Great Pretenders

"The opposite of play is not work. It is reality."
– Brian Sutton-Smith

Live action role-playing can be understood most clearly as a form of adult pretence, examined in detail in the article[58] 'Worlds of the Playing Field: Creating and Evaluating Experiences in Role-Playing Games' (2008), which demonstrates how LARP extends the cognitive mechanisms of childhood imaginative play. This perspective does not diminish the phenomenon; rather, it situates it within a universal human capacity to create meaning, to inhabit fictional worlds, and to act within them while remaining aware of their constructed nature. It is precisely the ability to hold the real and the fictional simultaneously that makes LARP a mature and complex practice. At the core of pretence lies projection: an imagined situation is overlaid onto real space. An ordinary object can become a weapon, a symbol of power, or a magical artefact; a gesture can signify a ritual, a contract, or a threat; a word can carry consequences only within the boundaries of the fiction. This is not an escape from reality, but a conscious exercise in the capacity to

[58] Montola, M. and Jaakko Stenros (2008). Playground worlds : creating and evaluating experiences of role-playing games. Helsinki: Ropecon Ry.

transform the world through imagination. The child who turns a cardboard box into a ship and the adult who performs a role in LARP rely on the same cognitive function – projective transformation.

Fiction develops through two principal processes. The first is inferential unfolding: the consequences that logically follow from an established premise. If a character is wounded, the effects persist; if an artefact emits light, it can serve as a signal; if the world contains magic, players adhere to its internal laws. The second process is creative unfolding: participants introduce new events, emotions, or ideas, provided they do not violate the coherence of the world already established. It is precisely this interweaving of logic and improvisation that keeps the game alive. These unfoldings may be internal, occurring in the player's thoughts, or external, expressed through words, gestures, and objects. Some actions are performed literally, while others are represented symbolically when real enactment would be dangerous or ethically unacceptable. Violence, injury, permanent damage – all are conveyed through signs whose authority exists only within the fiction. This underscores the necessity of clear rules and shared agreements that allow the game to remain both convincing and safe.

LARP requires a double consciousness: participants know when they are acting 'within the game world' and when they are acting as themselves. This distinction allows fluid movement between fiction and reality, without confusion and without the collapse of the experience. Ending a LARP is not an awakening from a dream; the illusion ceases not because it was a deception, but because it was consciously sustained. The reasons adults participate in LARP closely resemble the motivations that drive children's play: the need for social connection, for the creation and exploration of emotions, for the experience of situations that ordinary life rarely permits. One tests different roles, explores alternative versions of the self, negotiates identity through imagined circumstances. LARP offers a space for expression in which internal tensions and desires can be enacted without real-world consequences.

Immersion is often understood as a kind of magical transfer into another reality, but it can be described more simply: it is the automation of the unfolding of a fictional premise. When the link between impulse and role-based action becomes natural, the game world is experienced as immediate. This automation is a familiar process: the brain learns patterns and executes them effortlessly, making the experience feel convincing. The character in LARP is not a mystical transformation, but an expanded fictional premise of 'the self in this world'. It is a set of decisions about how that self thinks, feels, and acts within the game universe. Different styles of LARP emphasise different aspects – psychological, social, or narrative – but all are variations of the same projective play.

To understand LARP as adult pretence is to place it within the continuum of human playfulness. This does not reduce its seriousness; it explains it. The same mechanisms that allow a child to play house, war, or magic allow adults to experience complex emotions, to form communities, to create stories, and to inhabit worlds that reveal what everyday life conceals. In this sense, to say 'we are great pretenders' is an acknowledgment of a profound human capacity: the ability to transform reality through imagination and to discover, through play, genuine ways of understanding ourselves and others.

The Art of Immersion

"Digital media is the first that can simultaneously tell stories and simulate worlds."
— Janet H. Murray

The theme of immersive narratives gains new clarity with the book[59] The Art of Immersion: How the Digital Generation Is Remaking Hollywood, Madison Avenue, and the Way We Tell Stories (2012), which shows how technology transforms stories from linear narratives into worlds to be inhabited. According to its author Frank Rose, 'people no longer consume stories passively; they enter them.' Storytelling has always been a universal human practice through which people discover patterns in chaos and transmit knowledge. The human brain is structured to seek intention, plot, and meaning even where none objectively exist. Story is a mode of orientation in the world, and the need for it is deeply ingrained. Yet this invariant core transforms each time the medium itself changes. The digital age does not merely add a new channel; it alters the very structure of narrative. Print turned oral storytelling into the novel; cinema introduced montage thinking; television created new rhythms of attention. The internet, however, is the first medium that can be everything at once: text, sound, moving image, game, network; linear or branching. It does not simply tell stories; it allows audiences to enter them, explore them, and move within them. This capacity to step into a story rather than merely observe it gives rise to immersive narratives – non-linear, participatory, and expansive.

At first, the internet merely retransmitted older formats, but gradually it began to alter the very conception of storytelling. Deep media emerged, in which the story is no longer a text or a frame, but a space. The television series Lost turned viewers into a community of detectives; advertising campaigns began to use alternate realities; personal stories became digital traces that generate new forms of autobiography. The boundary between spectator and author dissolves: the audience no longer watches but participates, supplements, decodes, and plays. This transformation unfolds against the backdrop of disruption across traditional industries. Cinema maintains revenue but loses audiences; the music market contracts; the DVD format disappears; television ages; video games oscillate in their growth. This upheaval is not unprecedented, but this time it is not merely about a new medium, but about a shift in the habits of an entire generation. The internet displaces television not only as a technology, but as a cultural logic: attention is fragmented, participation is the norm, and the viewer does not want to wait – they want to be inside.

As a result, the very notion of 'audience' begins to lose meaning. The passive spectator gives way to the participant who expects the possibility of action. The gaming industry has long capitalised on this need through mechanics of engagement, points, levels, and rewards. These mechanics gradually migrate into media, advertising, and social platforms. Digital culture adopts the ludic principle as a foundation for storytelling. The story becomes something that unlocks, branches, and intertwines – something one moves through, rather than merely visually absorbs.

In parallel, a culture of collective creation emerges. Web 2.0 turned the user into an author: blogs, wikis, social networks, and video platforms enabled people to produce and share stories on a global scale. The internet became an environment in which individual narratives form a shared cultural field, and meaning arises from the connections between them. In this ecosystem, the story is not a finished product but a process – continuously shaped by participation, commentary, and remix.

This gives rise to an artistic movement marked by hybridity and proximity to reality. There is a drive towards authenticity, coupled with a readiness to blend fact and fiction, document and

[59] Rose, F. (2012). The art of immersion : how the digital generation is remaking Hollywood, Madison Avenue, and the way we tell stories. New York: W.W. Norton & Co.

invention. Truth is no longer perceived as a static point, but as an experience that unfolds through participation itself. The desire for truth expresses itself through incompleteness: fragments, testimonies, interweavings. Immersion functions as a framework within which a sense of presence is experienced, regardless of whether the facts are real or fabricated.
The greatest challenge facing this new art of storytelling is the management of participation. When the audience enters the story, control over the plot weakens. A tension emerges between freedom and structure: how can space for action be granted without the narrative disintegrating? This is the question confronting filmmakers, writers, advertising agencies, and game designers alike. Immersive narrative demands a new grammar, in which the plot is not dictated but sustained – like a world that must remain stable while it is being inhabited. Ultimately, immersion is not merely a technological effect, but a new mode of existence within narrative. It turns storytelling into an experience in which the real and the fictional blur, and meaning is generated in the very act of participation. The story becomes a space, the human becomes a participant, and culture becomes a network of interconnected worlds that unfold and change together with those who inhabit them.

Imagined Worlds That Do Not Collapse

"Reality is that which does not disappear when you stop believing in it. The main tool for manipulating reality is the manipulation of words."
— Philip K. Dick

The question of how to construct durable immersive worlds is explored by Frank Rose in The Art of Immersion (2012). It acquires particular urgency in an era in which stories are no longer told solely through text or image, but are lived online. The emergence of immersive media raises a fundamental problem: how to build a world that can withstand contact with its audience – a world that does not disintegrate at the first interaction, but is instead expanded by it. This lies at the heart of the new mode of storytelling: not the creation of a plot, but the construction of an environment that structures experience. Imagined worlds have always contained a tension between attraction and unease. People long to inhabit universes such as those of Star Wars, yet simultaneously fear that immersion in fabricated environments produces fabricated identities. This paradox is built into the very idea of a fictional universe: it must be convincing enough to be accepted, and transparent enough not to replace the real world. The key lies in architecture – how the world is built, what it permits, what it excludes, and what it demands of the person inside it.
The ‘immersive’ strategies of contemporary media intensify this problem. When digital technologies allow a shift from observation to participation, fiction ceases to be an autonomous construction and becomes a system that must respond to the presence of the spectator. This was evident in the events created around the continuation of Tron. The audience was not merely informed about the film; it was drawn into predesigned scenes that appeared to be ‘happening’ in the real world. The aim was not to present a product, but to open a gateway into a fictional universe. The world had to withstand verification in reality – crowds, unpredictable reactions, chance encounters. This type of immersion depends on expandability. The story is not confined to the film or the novel; it spills into the audience’s space: online clues, live events, hidden materials waiting to be discovered. The world must not only be stable; it must allow multiple points of entry. Stability here does not mean rigidity, but coherence: every element of the fiction must align with the others so that participation does not destroy it, but enriches it.

A second path to building durable worlds is technological. In institutions that use simulations for training, environments are created that resemble the holodeck of Star Trek: spaces in which characters 'respond', the world 'reacts', and every action produces a consequence. This is the most demanding form of immersion, because the unpredictable factor is the human being. Classical narrative controls its characters; immersive narrative must control only the frame. If the frame is weak, the world collapses. If it is too rigid, immersion evaporates. The balance is delicate: enough order to generate meaning, enough freedom to sustain life.

The construction of an immersive world inevitably raises the question of authenticity. When everything can be simulated, reality itself becomes an unstable category. As a result, audiences develop a heightened sensitivity to details that confer credibility: textures, imperfections, traces of 'life'. Authenticity no longer means truthfulness, but plausibility within the model. A world must acknowledge its own artificiality without appearing hollow. A universe collapses not because it is invented, but because it is unconvincing. This produces two contrasting strategies. One smooths and organises, turning the world into a flawless environment that promises comfort and strictly controls chaos. The other exposes the mechanisms, reveals the cables and cracks, and builds trust through transparency. Both approaches work, but each presupposes a different ethics of participation. The ordered world invites acceptance; the exposed world invites awareness. Regardless of the approach, a resilient fictional world must accept that sooner or later it will crack. The response to that rupture – both within the story and among the audience – is part of its durability. A well-built universe does not collapse at the first breach; it integrates it. It allows error, improvisation, unpredictability. This makes it closer to reality and therefore more immersive. To build a world that does not collapse is to create a structure stable enough to endure participation and open enough to invite it.

In the age of immersion, narrative is no longer merely a story, but a space. Those who create it must think like architects of experience rather than authors of fiction. The world must be imagined, yet functional; artificial, yet capable of producing real reactions; open to fracture, without disintegrating. Only then can it be inhabited – not for seconds, but for moments that endure.

Why Do Stories Govern Our Minds?

"Man is a storytelling animal."
— Alasdair MacIntyre

In Frank Rose's book[60] The Sea We Swim In: How Stories Work in a Data-Driven World (2021), the argument is developed that storytelling is not merely a cultural product, but the primary mechanism through which the human mind organises the world. Stories do not decorate thought; they structure it. For a long time, modern psychology relied on the assumption that logic is the dominant instrument of consciousness, yet it has gradually become clear that people experience reality as a sequence of connected episodes that form a plot. Narrative functions as a cognitive framework: it links facts, assigns intention to actions, and introduces order into the chaos of sensations. For this reason, disciplines that once regarded stories with suspicion have begun to recognise them as a key to understanding how the mind works. Memory is first and foremost a story about the past; identity is a story about the self; morality is a story about what ought to be.

[60] Rose, F. (2021). The Sea We Swim In: How Stories Work in a Data-Driven World. W. W. Norton & Company.

Neurologists and psychologists show that people do not simply process information, but organise it into narrative structures that become deeply embedded in their mental models of the world. Stories thus function as a kind of ‘operating system’ for human thought. This has important consequences for understanding persuasion. Research on so-called ‘transportation’ demonstrates that the more deeply a person is immersed in a story, the more likely they are to accept its implications. It makes little difference whether the narrative is presented as fiction or fact: emotional engagement shapes perception and attitude. Studies show that readers who identify with a protagonist more readily absorb values, behavioural patterns, or even political impulses embedded in the narrative. Story influences the mind through pathways inaccessible to abstract argument: it bypasses defences, activates empathy, and creates an experience that feels personal.

This mechanism is double-edged. On the one hand, stories can foster understanding, solidarity, and the revision of prejudice. On the other, they can reinforce false beliefs, fears, and stereotypes. When crucial information about a character is revealed later in a narrative, identification has already occurred and the reader is more willing to reconsider their own assumptions. When a stereotype is activated early, however, it blocks immersion altogether. It becomes clear that not only the message, but the structure of the narrative determines its effect. Neuroscience adds another dimension: the synchronisation of brain activity. When groups of people listen to or watch a well-structured story, certain regions of their brains begin to operate in unison. Narrative literally aligns neural patterns, creating a temporary shared field of perception. This helps explain the collective power of stories – why films, books, and myths can shape entire communities that share the same emotional map of the world. This insight underpins the practice of narrative thinking: the attempt to apply the tools of storytelling beyond literature and cinema. Hero, goal, obstacle, transformation – this is not merely a dramaturgical schema, but a model through which people understand problems, motivations, and relationships. In education, medicine, leadership, and social work, stories are used to create meaning and engagement where raw data fails. Narrative reveals what is at stake, embodies abstraction, and positions the listener not as a detached observer, but as a participant.

Yet the power of stories also has a dark side. In the age of social media, narratives travel faster than facts, and compelling emotional plots often displace more complex truths. Stories create an illusion of clarity where reality is uncertain. A conspiracy theory can feel more convincing than a nuanced explanation simply because it imposes a sinister order on chaotic events. People are inclined to string facts into plot-like patterns even when those patterns are false. This is the narrative fallacy: the impulse to manufacture meaning at any cost. Stories can also become instruments of power. Propaganda, political myths, and ideological frameworks operate through repetition and emotional charge. Some narratives grow so dominant that they begin to define what can be thought at all. Yet stories can also correct harmful structures. Counter-narratives – alternative stories grounded in facts but articulated with empathy and dramaturgical clarity – serve as a defence against manipulation. Data persuades with difficulty; a story built upon it persuades more easily.

The task, therefore, is not to abandon stories – that is impossible. The mind thinks through them. What matters is understanding their mechanisms: how they immerse, how they persuade, how they synchronise perception, and how they shape identity. When logic and narrative collide, narrative often wins the first round. Logic can win the next ones if it is presented in a form the human mind can assimilate: through characters, conflict, meaning, and change. Stories govern our minds because they are the means by which the mind renders the world intelligible. And in an age in which information is endless and unstable, the durable narrative remains the most powerful instrument of orientation – one that can deceive or liberate, distort or heal. That is why it is crucial to understand not only the stories we hear, but also the stories we tell ourselves.

The Four Levels of Immersion

"A fictional world must be sufficiently complete and coherent to sustain the reader's immersion."
— Marie-Laure Ryan

In Frank Rose's book The Sea We Swim In (2021), immersion is examined as the key way in which audiences enter a narrative and gradually begin to experience it as a world of their own. People do not seek content as such, but sensation – they want to be inside a universe, to share it, and to make it part of themselves. For this reason, the structure of immersion must be conceived from the perspective of the audience rather than the logic of platforms. The four levels describe how different forms of media interaction are arranged from the surface to the depths, forming a sustainable ecosystem that maintains interest, participation, and emotional investment.

The first level is one-way content – film, television series, book, podcast, comic, any form that does not require an active response. This is the entry point into the world: the viewer watches, the listener surrenders to the flow, the reader disappears into the plot. Immersion here is quiet and involuntary – time slips away as the story unfolds. All extensions that do not demand participation also belong to this level. It is the foundation of every narrative, from which the possibility of deeper experience emerges.

The second level builds through personalisation and interactivity. Quizzes, mini-games, mobile applications, chat filters, automated messages – everything in which the user makes a choice, presses a button, or conversationally 'steps into' the story. Engagement becomes active, and the individual begins to feel like a participant. This is not yet deep immersion, but it is the gateway to it: the more actions one performs, the more easily the world is perceived as a space in which one is present.

The third level is multidirectional and social. This includes fan forums, groups, multiplayer games, social networks, collective storytelling, remixes, memes, fan theories, and all situations in which the audience begins to produce its own content. The narrative becomes a community. The creator no longer controls every detail; they step back to allow fans to 'own' the world. Paradoxically, as control diminishes, value increases. The audience senses that it is not merely following the story, but extending it. Here immersion becomes emotional and cultural: the world starts to live beyond the original work, sustained by thousands of voices.

The fourth level is the live, physical experience – events, installations, training environments, games in real space, pop-up locations, special fan gatherings. This level is difficult to scale, but it carries immense power. Physical presence generates cultural resonance: participants carry the emotion with them long after the event ends. Reality and fiction touch. This level can transform one's relationship to a story, turning it from entertainment into personal memory, from content into experience.

The four levels function together as an ecosystem. One-way storytelling establishes the foundation; interaction expands it; community sustains and develops it; live experience gives it meaning. Each person enters at a different level: one watches only the film, another plays the game, a third creates their own material, a fourth attends a physical event. No one can predict which level will attract the most people or which will deepen emotion most profoundly. What matters is that all pathways remain open.

The same model can be applied not only to television series or major franchises, but also to brands, institutions, campaigns, educational formats, or social movements. When a brand creates mini-worlds rather than selling directly, it builds trust, connection, and a sense of belonging.

When an institution designs a multi-layered experience, it does not merely inform, but engages. When a community generates its own content around a cause, it becomes part of the narrative rather than an external observer. Yet this can also be dangerous. The same mechanisms that build fan communities can be used for manipulation, radicalisation, and ideological play. Online groups, memetic narratives, social rituals, and dynamics of belonging can create immersive environments capable of displacing critical thinking. The four levels are not inherently benign or abusive – everything depends on the architecture of the world being constructed and the purposes that drive it.

Immersion is the new way in which people enter stories – not as spectators, but as participants. The more clearly its levels are understood, the more ethically and meaningfully it can be used. The four levels map how stories become environments in which people do not merely watch, but live; do not merely follow, but co-author; do not merely listen, but discover themselves.

The Shape of the Future

"We shape our future, and then our future shape us."
— Marshall McLuhan (paraphrased)

Immersive technologies are changing not only the way stories are told, but the way people experience reality itself. While new forms of digital experience promise freedom, creativity, and the expansion of the senses, they simultaneously generate conditions for confusion, manipulation, and loss of orientation. These processes are analysed systematically in Frank Rose's The Sea We Swim In (2021), where immersion is presented as a force that thins the boundary between the imaginary and the real, transforming attention into the scarcest and most coveted resource of our century. One of the clearest examples of this new era can be found in spaces such as Otherworld in London – a hybrid of bar, technological arcade, and individual VR capsules. The visitor enters a physical room of brick and metal, but within seconds finds themselves in a zombie apocalypse, on an alien planet, or inside a musical ritual. The contrast is part of the enchantment: the physical world and the digital spectacle intensify one another, producing a sense of reality more vivid than reality itself. This principle is no longer confined to play; it has become a general model of the media ecosystem. Immersion ceases to mean 'I tell you a story' and becomes 'I allow you to tell your own'. Yet where creativity is possible, deception is also possible. Over the past decade, narratives, game design, and social platforms have merged into new hybrids whose boundary with reality is dangerously thin. The most striking example is the rise of conspiracy movements structured like alternative reality games: sequences of riddles, rabbit holes, secret messages, and communities that cast the participant as the hero of a fabricated epic. This resemblance is not accidental. The very mechanics designed to entertain turn out to be the same mechanics that can radicalise. Immersion that produces play in one context produces belief in another.

At the same time, technological and entertainment industries reinforce this logic. Research centres around the world develop systems for evaluating narratives according to 'interest', predictability, and emotional patterns. The aim is to minimise creative risk by anticipating audience reaction before it occurs. There is nothing inherently sinister in this, but it reveals the direction of travel: towards standardisation of experience, towards formats that must 'work' rather than surprise or innovate. Immersion begins to be designed not as art, but as attention engineering. Meanwhile, the systems that power digital platforms are built to hold the gaze for as long as possible. Algorithms first learned how to stimulate interest, then how to stimulate outrage, and finally how to maintain a continuous stream of stimuli that allows not a second of

distraction. Entertainment gradually becomes an infrastructure of dependency. When reactions, clicks, and comments are measured in real time, every frame and every word can be optimised for maximum emotional arousal. Truth becomes secondary to engagement. This pressure produces not only saturation, but disorientation. With the emergence of deepfakes, viewers can no longer be certain whether what they see is evidence or fabrication. Trust – the basic building material of society – is destabilised. If everything can be simulated, what remains credible? Here immersion ceases to be pleasure and becomes risk: the risk of manipulation, deception, and the substitution of reality with spectacle. Yet this process has another side. Artists, theatre collectives, and educational laboratories use immersion to cultivate critical literacy. Immersive games, narratives, and simulations can teach participants how to recognise manipulation, how to perceive their own cognitive traps, and how to distinguish between engagement and genuine understanding. Immersion becomes a tool for building resilience, not merely for escape.

For this reason, the question of the shape of the future is a question of architecture: how to design worlds that offer freedom without misleading; that enchant without enclosing; that reveal rather than conceal. Immersion will not disappear – it is already the way people encounter stories. What remains is the choice of what kind of world it will produce. If it is built solely for engagement, it will collapse. If it is built for understanding, it may become a space for new forms of thought, community, and meaning.

Strategic Games

"Games don't just motivate us to play; they give us the feeling that our actions matter in a meaningful system."
— Jane McGonigal

In the new century, politics and culture cease to be domains of observation and gradually become game-like environments. This transformation alters the very genesis of media narrative and the way strategic communications can function. Stories are no longer told for passive spectators; they are designed as scenarios in which people have roles, tasks, choices, and missions. Every strategem for the future must take this shift into account: if a narrative does not provide space for participation, it dies. If a scenario does not offer roles, the audience invents them on its own. Play becomes a social apparatus, and the media become a mechanics of playing. The traditional notion of an 'audience' collapses because the audience no longer listens – it acts. Political campaigns, corporate brands, activist movements, and media formats reorganise themselves around the same principle: not a message addressed to a passive mass, but a game framework within which people create their own content and their own meaning. Interpretive communities – groups organised not by demography but by the way they assign meaning – function like guilds and teams. They do not wait for instructions from above; they play the world as they see fit. This turns every act of communication into a risk: if it does not align with the structure of the game, it is rewritten, replaced, remixed, or rejected. In this environment, strategic communication ceases to be control over narrative and becomes the design of game conditions. What matters is not what an organisation says, but what kind of experience it offers. Do people have a role? Do they act at their own pace? Can they participate, alter the course of events, create new plotlines? When these conditions are present, communication becomes an ecosystem: a model that does not merely inform, but mobilises.

This logic also reverses the structure of the media. Mass media once offered a stage for observation; today social platforms impose a stage for participation, in which watching is only

the first level, followed by commentary, remix, parody, and shared action. News functions as a series of game quests in which people search for clues, identify ‘enemies’, build coalitions, and experience dramaturgical twists. Politics rewards belonging with symbolic points – likes, reposts, status signals. Every message becomes an entry point into a game, and its success depends on the extent to which the audience can become a co-author. For this reason, strategic thinking can no longer rely on concepts inherited from the past – ‘targeting’, ‘control’, ‘reputation’. The new logic demands the creation of role-based architecture. Every community must have its function, its perspective, its ‘mission’ within the larger narrative. People do not believe in overly complex meta-narratives, but they immediately engage with clear game mechanics. That is why the most successful campaigns and movements are not those that broadcast messages, but those that construct situations in which participants can experience the narrative rather than merely hear it. This gives rise to the need for a strategic scenario rather than strategic communication. A scenario describes what should happen, while leaving space for improvisation. It defines structure without dictating content. Within it, organisations do not speak ‘to’ audiences, but ‘with’ them, leaving gaps, paths, and choices. In political and cultural contexts, this means abandoning the model ‘we speak – you listen’. It means including people as co-creators of the future, not as spectators of decisions made elsewhere. In this new environment, the passive viewer is impossible. If no role is provided, one will be constructed – sometimes constructive, sometimes dangerous. Conspiracy movements are an example of a self-generated game framework: because institutions failed to offer scenarios for participation, people built their own, complete with missions, villains, and epics. The failure of institutions was that they remained theatres while the world had already become a game.

The only sustainable strategem for the future is one that accepts the ludic character of culture as a foundation, not an exception. Politics must provide roles, not instructions; culture must offer spaces for action, not platforms for spectacle; the media must create frameworks for shared meaning-making, not megaphones for transmission. The age of audiences has passed. The age of participants has arrived – players in narratives they themselves help to write. Strategic power no longer lies in monologue, but in the structure of the game. Whoever creates roles governs the narrative. Whoever governs the narrative governs the future.

Scenarios for the Future

“Political power is increasingly a competition for the ability to shape narratives about the future.”
— Joseph Nye

In a world where uncertainty itself becomes a primary resource, think tanks play a paradoxical role: they do not merely analyse risks and model trends, but govern — and at times actively produce — the very crises they later present as objects of expert management. Scenario thinking appears as a neutral tool for exploring possible futures, yet in practice it often functions as a mechanism for the strategic shaping of political reality. These institutions transform the future into a narrative resource through which public perception can be influenced, policies legitimised, and heroes, antagonists, and objectives carefully modelled. The scenarios constructed by think tanks are not simply intellectual exercises. They operate as ‘model dramas’, in which crisis functions as a structural act and resolution as an instrument of governability. This is precisely why many such institutions do not limit themselves to forecasting dangers, but actively participate in their production and channelling. From the strategy of ‘cognitive infiltration’

proposed by Cass Sunstein as a means of controlling conspiratorial communities, to military practices based on false-flag and red-herring operations, it becomes clear that narratives of the future are often part of the staging of the scenario itself, not merely its observation. As Cass Sunstein[61] argues, 'conspiracy theories are a form of narrative that can be managed, guided, or even redirected through cognitive infiltration.' History offers numerous examples of how the public image of figures initially framed as 'terrorists' or extremists is reshaped over time through expert, diplomatic, and media narratives. The trajectories of leaders such as Nelson Mandela — long portrayed as a threat — or the Syrian president Farouk al-Sharaa in his role as an acceptable international intermediary, demonstrate how plastic the categories of 'terrorism', 'legitimacy', and 'heroism' truly are. In many of these transformations, think tanks, foundations, and media centres play a decisive role: they provide the frame, the language, and the scenario through which societies recalibrate their moral expectations.

For this reason, scenario planning, presented as a tool of risk management, often functions as a mechanism for producing the very crises it subsequently claims to resolve. At its core lies the logic of gameplay: roles are defined, playing fields delineated, predictable moves anticipated, and participants assigned the tasks they are expected to 'perform'. Media, politics, and expert communities operate as three layers of a shared gaming environment, in which crisis is not an accident but a dramaturgical device, and society is not a spectator but a player, drawn in beyond its own volition. Social and political movements frequently require 'heroes', and the most effective way to generate them is through the inflation of threats followed by their 'containment'. This mechanism is well known in screenwriting: conflicts are introduced in order to justify the transformation of the character. In real-world politics, think tanks employ similar structures — presenting certain groups as dangerous, only for those same groups to undergo a process of narrative 'rewriting' years later, emerging as partners, reformers, or symbols of freedom. In this way, the media scenario does not merely respond to the world; it constructs it. Wars, peace treaties, sanctions, international initiatives — all of these begin first in the laboratories of the future as models, playable prototypes in which crisis becomes a resource for legitimacy and heroes become products of moral editing. Scenarios set the tempo, structure the plot, distribute roles, and most importantly determine which figures may transition from the 'dark side' to the 'light'.

The contemporary media environment transforms this process into an interactive drama. Former spectators are no longer passive audiences; they participate, comment, share, and interpret. They become co-authors of the scenarios, and through-play introduces the logic of the game into political culture itself: protests become spectacles, campaigns become missions, crises become catalysts for new roles. When people play rather than merely observe, scenarios become life itself, not just its representation. Here lies the central paradox: the more people participate in constructing 'possible futures', the more difficult it becomes to distinguish fiction from reality, heroism from staged transformation. At the heart of every effective scenario stands a hero — but in politics this hero is constructed, not discovered. And when think tanks model the future, this is precisely what they model: the pathways through which heroes will be invented, the routes by which enemies will become allies, and crises will be transformed into scenes of growth. The future, then, is not predicted — it is directed. And the scenario does not wait for its actor. It creates one.

[61] Cass R. Sunstein & Adrian Vermeule, Conspiracy Theories: Causes and Cures (2009)

The Future of Scenarios

"The inability to predict deviations means the inability to predict the course of history. We can only prepare for what we cannot predict."
— Nassim Nicholas Taleb

In a world where organisations move faster than their own plans, storytelling about the future becomes a primary instrument of orientation. 'However certain our expectations may be, the anticipated moment may arrive unexpectedly,' T. S. Eliot reminds us — and this is precisely what makes scenarios necessary. Companies no longer win through the accumulation of data, but through the capacity to learn, to shift their frame, and to rehearse possible worlds. "What if" storytelling is a form of disciplined play that allows organisations to test strategies without paying the price of mistakes in reality. Scenario thinking does not attempt to predict the future; it organises alternatives. It reveals the forces that can abruptly alter direction — technological leaps, political shocks, demographic shifts, climatic thresholds. When these forces are translated into stories, leaders begin to see them earlier. In this sense, scenarios are simultaneously tools of anticipation and of liberation: they allow the hidden assumptions around which business has quietly hardened into dogma to be questioned. Storytelling brings heretical ideas into a safe environment, where they can be tested before they become inevitabilities.

The roots of this approach are military. After the Second World War, military staffs used war games to explore alternative tactics. Later, futurists transformed the method into a civilian instrument: to prevent a disaster, one must first narrate it. Business adopted this logic most visibly through a major energy company that demonstrated in the 1970s that scenarios are not forecasts, but mechanisms of adaptation. When the unexpected event occurred, the organisation responded faster because it had already 'lived' in that possible world. Working with scenarios is a visual dialogue. It does not obey the linear logic of spreadsheet forecasts, but branches the future into several plausible, mutually contradictory stories. These stories are built from driving forces — technologies, capital flows, climate trends, demography — and from deep uncertainties such as regulation, rates of adoption, or public attitudes. The future is then assembled into a small set of internally coherent worlds, each with its own name, logic, winners, and losers. In workshops, leaders 'enter' these worlds and play roles: what decisions would they make, what risks would they take, which investment or technological path would be sensible in that context?

In practice, two schools dominate. The first — defensive — uses scenarios to expand peripheral vision and sharpen sensitivity to weak signals. The second — ambitious — uses stories to organise collective intention around a desired future and to plan backwards the actions that could make it real. The strongest frameworks combine both approaches: they prepare for risks while mobilising the desire for change. Well-designed scenarios are not abstract. They force leaders to think about the decisions they would make 'on Monday' — concrete strategic choices about resources, platforms, partnerships, and supply chains. Effective scenario designers avoid the trap of decorative presentations and keep the process alive: through listening, rethinking, and adapting the stories as new data emerges. The greatest risk is for scenarios to become ideological exercises; when that happens, trust collapses. The stories must be sufficiently different to challenge thinking, and sufficiently realistic to change behaviour. When scenarios work, their effects accumulate. They reduce dependence on point forecasts, surface no-regret moves, prepare organisations for reversible decisions, build teams with a stronger sense of complexity, and connect strategy to a narrative that people can follow. Leaders who can tell plausible stories about multiple futures inspire confidence — among investors, employees, and within the organisation's own structures.

Here the major transition becomes visible: the future of storytelling lies not in inventing more persuasive plots, but in creating scenographic spaces into which different participants can enter and play. Good strategy is not a monologue; it is a jointly produced interactive drama, in which roles expand and decisions are tested as if in rehearsal. Scenarios prepare people not for a single 'probable' future, but for multiple possible worlds in which their choices matter. If Eliot is right, and what is foreseen always arrives unexpectedly, then the only reasonable preparation lies in storytelling: to rehearse the future before it rehearses us.

The Multiplayer Metaverse

"In the Metaverse you can be anyone you want, so people become versions of themselves that they can't be in reality."
— Neal Stevenson, Snow Crash (1992)

The transition into the new century is not simply a rejection of grand narratives, but the emergence of a new type of civilisational structure in which people no longer follow pre-written plots but participate in unfolding scenarios. The old philosophical systems that once ordered the world through concepts were succeeded by ideological programmes that ordered it through slogans. Today, both fade before a more radical metaphorical shift: the Metaverse replaces Metaphysics. Where the world was once explained through theories, it is now experienced through participation. Where civilisations once produced myths, they now produce environments. The Metaverse began as a science-fiction metaphor, but it has gradually become a civilisational model. Virtual spaces—first experimental, then social, then economic—started to function as a new form of 'public time', in which people not only communicate but also build identities, institutions, prestige, and influence. Across the different versions of this new world—from early three-dimensional communities, through social networks, to contemporary platforms—a simple truth has taken shape: we no longer observe the world from the outside; we live inside its models. This transformation changes the very idea of narrative. The grand stories of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries—of progress, revolution, ideology, salvation—relied on a distance between audience and stage. Today that distance has almost vanished. People participate: they create images, form groups, shape events, and transform communities through actions that take place in real or virtual time. The spectators' gallery has disappeared; only participation remains.

In this new civilisational form, time fragments into multiple parallel rhythms. Once, History governed everyone through a single great clock: one narrative, one goal, one direction. Today each individual lives within multiple storylines—professional, digital, social, identitarian, activist—which are not subordinated to a single hierarchy. The world becomes a multi-layered environment in which small events can alter large structures. This is not chaos, but a new order in which meaning no longer descends from a single source but emerges at the intersection of many perspectives. From this arises what might be called 'network dramaturgy'—not a composition imposed by an author, but a plot that unfolds through interactions. Education changes as well. The old model of learning, in which one ascends a ladder with predefined steps, gives way to a dispersed, fluid system in which knowledge accumulates through experience. People no longer follow a single path, but multiple entry points into multiple possibilities. Contemporary culture is not a ladder, but a map—and each person redraws it according to their capacities, preferences, and momentary conditions.

Yet this new universe also carries moral consequences. When everyone participates, responsibility becomes distributed. Causes are entangled; consequences ripple across the entire

environment. In such a world it is difficult to identify a single culprit—but also difficult to escape complicity. We live within an environment that everyone produces and everyone sustains, which transforms the very idea of guilt, choice, and ethics. The writers of modernism anticipated this condition. In their attention to fleeting experience, to the coincidence of the private and the public, to the blending of times and perceptions, one can already glimpse today's regime of 'flow'. What was once an artistic experiment has become a daily ontology. Politics shifts as well. It turns from a march towards a final order into a continuous rewriting of the rules of the shared world. Mass protests, local assemblies, online communities—these are no longer appeals to power, but rewritings of the structure in which power itself takes place. Markets, for their part, grasped the power of scenarisation long ago. States and corporations began to operate as extended environments in which 'updates' are released, new regimes imposed, conditions altered, and society is compelled to live through these changes rather than merely evaluate them from the outside.

But the most profound transformation is philosophical. Metaphysics was once the doctrine of what lies beyond the world. Today, the Metaverse becomes a new doctrine of the world as environment, in which ideas are not articulated but experienced. Mythologies are not narrated; they are inhabited. Ideologies are not defended through argument; they become structures through which life passes. Thus a new form of civilisation emerges: not spectatorial but participatory, not descriptive but environmental. The world is no longer a story told by someone else. The world is an environment in which everyone lives and which everyone collectively shapes. In this sense, the Metaverse is not a technology but a destiny—a space where the future is created from within, by people who do not wait for history to find them, but take part in writing it.

Conclusion: Vonnegut's Shape of Stories

The Shapes of Stories

"Stories have very simple forms, forms that even computers can understand."
-Kurt Vonnegut

Kurt Vonnegut's rejected master's thesis[62] from 1947, titled The Fluctuations Between Good and Evil in Simple Tasks, occupies a peculiar place in the history of literary theory. It was dismissed as 'too simple' and 'too playful', despite advancing a bold hypothesis: all stories possess a structure that can be represented graphically, and movement between good and evil functions as a primary organising principle of narrative. Vonnegut insisted that simplicity was not trivialisation but a method for revealing universal patterns. In 1971 the University of Chicago finally accepted the novel Cat's Cradle as the equivalent of the rejected thesis and awarded him the degree that had previously been denied. This historical context illuminates the later development of Vonnegut's idea of the 'shapes of stories'. His proposal to place time on a horizontal axis and evaluative fortune on a vertical one is not merely a pedagogical gesture but a continuation of his original concept of structural fluctuation. The graphic representation of movement between rise, fall and indeterminacy seeks to capture the basic trajectories through

[62] Vonnegut, K. (1947). The Fluctuations Between Good and Evil in Simple Tasks. Unpublished master's thesis, University of Chicago.

which narrative produces effect. The diagrams—'Man in a Hole', 'Boy Meets Girl', 'Cinderella', 'From Bad to Worse', and 'Hamlet'—function as analytical abstractions that make it possible to identify recurring rhythms of change. 'Man in a Hole' models crisis and recovery; 'Boy Meets Girl' traces the reversals of desire and loss; 'Cinderella' presents a triadic structure of compensation; continuous decline articulates existential degradation; and 'Hamlet' demonstrates how a narrative can refuse stable evaluation. The last form is especially central to Vonnegut's philosophy: life often does not allow one to determine whether an event is a blessing or a curse, and it is precisely this ambiguity that produces a sense of truthfulness. In recent decades, computer-assisted literary analysis has confirmed his intuition. Algorithms for analysing emotional valence process thousands of novels and reveal a limited repertoire of recurring 'emotional trajectories'. The detected models—'rags to riches', 'riches to rags', 'Icarus', 'Oedipus', 'Cinderella', 'Man in a Hole'—correspond directly to Vonnegut's graphic forms. Although the method neglects context and style, it demonstrates that stories organise themselves around a small number of structural movements, endlessly repeated in new variations. It is in this context that Vonnegut's famous joke, delivered in public lectures, acquires its full meaning: that stories have forms so simple that 'even computers can understand them'. This is neither a mockery of literature nor of algorithms, but a comment on the nature of narrative itself. It suggests that storytelling always tends towards reduction—towards a simplified movement from birth to death, from good to bad and back again.

Algorithms succeed in processing vast textual corpora precisely because stories repeat a limited number of patterns. Machines understand stories because stories are already structured like algorithms: sequences of fluctuations revolving around fundamental categories such as hope, loss, decline and recovery. Vonnegut deploys the joke as a philosophical diagnosis: human storytelling necessarily simplifies the world, translating complex moral and existential processes into traceable lines of change. This does not mean that form exhausts content. The graph is a reduction designed to capture rhythm rather than meaning. A rise may signify political liberation or personal romance; a fall may indicate tragic guilt or social injustice. Form registers movement without determining moral value or cultural significance. This is precisely why it is useful: it allows structural decisions in narrative to be identified without replacing its multilayered semiotic and ethical dimensions. The method of drawing narrative arcs also serves a practical function. It exposes stagnation, excessive acceleration, missing motivating events and unearned reversals. It reveals structural inconsistencies that remain invisible to purely intuitive reading. Yet there is also a risk: excessive reliance on form can turn narrative into schema. Vonnegut himself warns against this by showing how Hamlet escapes every attempt at categorisation and sustains a space of indeterminacy in which meaning remains mobile and evaluation unstable. Ultimately, Vonnegut's proposed simplicity is not a primitive reduction but a methodological stance. It assumes that stories can be understood by examining their movements: from point A to point B, from good to bad, from fall to rise. The simple line sharpens attention to structure without cancelling complexity. For this reason, his early text—dismissed as 'too playful'—proves to be a foundational contribution to the philosophy of narrative: structures that appear elementary are in fact the key to understanding how stories move, how they affect, and why they remain recognisable even to machines.

The Emotional Arc of Narrative

"The emotional arcs of a large body of stories reveal a set of basic forms common across cultures and eras."
— Andrew J. Reagan

The article[63] 'The emotional arcs of stories are dominated by six basic shapes' (2016) by Andrew J. Reagan and his co-authors lays the foundation for one of the most influential findings in the study of narrative through big data: stories, regardless of genre or historical period, follow a limited set of stable emotional arcs. These arcs describe changes in emotional valence—the movement between good and bad, rise and fall—within a narrative. The study explicitly revisits Kurt Vonnegut's once-dismissed hypothesis about the shapes of stories and seeks to validate it empirically by applying computational methods and algorithms to the analysis of large textual corpora. The discovery becomes possible through the development of digital libraries, natural language processing, and analytical tools that allow literature to be treated as a data set. Each text is analysed as a time series over which a sliding window of tens of thousands of words moves. At each position, the average 'emotional value' of the words is calculated using a specialised sentiment lexicon, producing a curve—an emotional arc. This reduction does not capture irony, subtext, or semantic ambivalence at the level of individual phrases, but across sufficiently large segments it extracts a stable signal of overall emotional dynamics. It is precisely this stability that allows texts to be grouped according to structural similarities in their emotional curves. The analytical techniques employed—singular value decomposition, hierarchical clustering, and self-organising maps—independently reproduce the same result: stories in the English-language canon cluster around six basic forms. The first is the classic rise, in which the plot begins at a neutral or low level and steadily ascends, structuring a 'rags to riches' trajectory. The second is its inverse, a continuous decline organising the tragic movement 'from riches to rags'. The third form, 'man in a hole', depicts a fall followed by recovery, a cyclical arc deeply embedded in Western storytelling traditions. The fourth, 'Icarus', rises sharply before collapsing abruptly. The fifth, 'Cinderella', traces a rise, a fall, and a renewed ascent. The sixth, 'Oedipus', begins with a fall, moves through a brief recovery, and ends in definitive collapse. The significance of these forms becomes clearer through control tests. When the same methods are applied to texts with randomly shuffled words or to algorithmically generated noise, no structure appears. The emotional profile is flat, lacking distinctive turns or clusters. The absence of curves in these null models demonstrates that real stories possess an internal emotional geometry that cannot be reduced to chance. This geometry is also linked to popularity. Stories structured around the Icarus, Oedipus, or double 'man in a hole' arcs circulate and are shared more intensively, while simple forms of continuous rise or continuous fall show weaker social virality.

The reason lies in human expectations: dramatic contrast, anticipatory tension, and bidirectional change generate stronger emotional charge. Stories unfold through a series of reversals that capture attention because they resonate with internal psychological rhythms. This reveals a deeper connection between emotional arcs and patterns of human behaviour. Social processes—romantic relationships, political crises, economic cycles, ideological ascents and collapses—often follow the same structural gestures as fiction. Network theory, behavioural economics, and the analysis of social dynamics show that mass behaviour is governed by rhythms of hope, decline, recovery, and renewed tension. Narrative forms thus emerge as forms of collective

[63] Reagan, A.J., Mitchell, L., Kiley, D., Danforth, C.M. and Dodds, P.S. (2016). The emotional arcs of stories are dominated by six basic shapes. EPJ Data Science, 5(1). doi:https://doi.org/10.1140/epjds/s13688-016-0093-1.

experience. Storytelling, in this sense, functions as a mechanism for modelling social emotionality. When media, television series, political campaigns, and digital platforms repeatedly reproduce the same dramaturgical patterns—crisis, escalation, climax, catharsis—audiences do not merely observe them but begin to experience the world through them. Narrative structure becomes a behavioural template. It prescribes what a crisis should look like, where the turning point lies, and when catharsis must occur. People step into the roles these forms make available. Narrative structure thus becomes an instrument for managing attention and emotion. When sufficiently large groups undergo the same emotional movements, a collective rhythm emerges, capable of accelerating panics, amplifying enthusiasm, catalysing conflict, or producing moral mobilisation. In this sense, the forms are not only descriptive but prescriptive: they construct expectations that reality itself begins to follow. The question, therefore, is not whether people tell stories in the same ways, but why these ways exert such power. Emotional arcs describe the minimal structures of human feeling, but also the forms through which societies understand themselves. Awareness of these arcs is not merely a technical skill but an ethical task: to use them not for manipulation, but to create spaces of understanding, to expand possibilities, and to free the human role from pre-written scripts. The study ultimately confirms Vonnegut's joke that stories have such simple and recognisable forms that even computers can understand them. Why, then, humans forget the simplicity of their own narratives and complicate them into paradox remains an open question—perhaps this tension between the simple and the complex is itself part of the story of life.

Fictional Humans and Human Fictions

"We are what we pretend to be, so we have to be very careful what we choose to pretend to be."
— Kurt Vonnegut

The essay[64] 'Fictional Humans and Humanist Fictions' foregrounds the question of how literature creates people, while humanity creates fictions. This double movement lies at the core of Timequake (1997), Kurt Vonnegut's semi-autobiographical novel, which turns the boundary between metaphor and reality into a field of inquiry. At the centre of the text stands the idea that humans live simultaneously in a biological world and in invented structures through which they define, recognise and sometimes lose themselves. One of the key conceptual axes is the temporal 'quake' that forces humanity to relive ten years without the possibility of choice. This enforced repetition exposes the hidden mechanics of human behaviour. When will disappears, only habit remains: action becomes a function of the past, and life reveals itself as an automated rehearsal. Fiction thus uncovers the structural fragility of the 'human', showing how easily it can be replaced by the mechanical. A second layer of the analysis concerns the disintegration of narrative form itself. The text is composed of scattered fragments, notes, anecdotes, aphorisms, paradoxes and autobiographical detours. This is not a weakness but a principle: fragmentation mirrors the dispersed consciousness of modernity. The world is no longer coherent, and language should not pretend to be whole. The novel's structure demonstrates that fiction is not a smooth surface but a space of cracks through which reflection can enter. The fictional human is not a

[64] Vonnegutreview.com. (2025). Fictional Humans and Humanist Fictions. [online] Available at: http://www.vonnegutreview.com/2013/09/timequake.html [Accessed 17 Oct. 2025].

completed character but a constructed form assembled from imperfections. The theme of repetition acquires a social dimension as well. The novel depicts a culture that operates through cycles—advertising, elections, scandals, mass hysterias. The constant circulation of the same content turns people into carriers of roles that repetition has rendered inevitable. In this sense, the fiction of society overtakes the fiction of literature. Human life begins to resemble a script written by external forces: the market, the media, ideology, technology. The illusion of choice conceals the fact that patterns of behaviour are already structured in advance. When the temporal 'quake' ends and free will returns, people fall into chaos. They no longer know how to act without the predetermined track of repetition. Freedom, stripped of habit, proves paralysing. This crisis reveals a paradox: humans claim to desire freedom, yet almost always move according to fictions they have reproduced themselves or that have been imposed from outside. Life in repetition is a form of servitude, but freedom without a narrative stands on the edge of disintegration. From this tension arises the fundamental question: what does it mean to be human? The text suggests that humans are beings who create stories not to embellish reality, but to make it inhabitable. Fictional forms are not deceptions but instruments of orientation. Myths, novels, comedies and tragedies all function as structures through which moral imagination is shaped. Human fictions sustain the possibility of action. Without them, life collapses into repetition without direction.

Yet fiction has another side: it can become an ideological mechanism. Social regimes also generate narratives—of progress, prosperity, identity—that organise behaviour. Here the boundary between the fictional and the political dissolves. People become characters in stories they did not write themselves, and fiction shifts from a liberating force to an instrument of governance. Timequake implies that the only way out lies in an ethics of compassion. Fiction can be salvific if it is used not for control, but for understanding. It must reveal complexity, expose error, and open space for choice. The fictional humans in the text function as mirrors: they render visible human weakness, fear and hope. Through them, the reader recognises personal vulnerability, and this recognition generates a new form of community. Literary fiction thus becomes a critique of the humanist fictions society uses to stabilise itself. It dismantles the myths of autonomous individuality, continuous progress and rational order, replacing them with a more fragile but more human perspective: humans are not masters of fate, but they are capable of producing meaning through shared experience. Ultimately, the novel insists that the living human is always more than the role being played. Fictional humans are a means of exploring the limits of human fictions, but the deeper aim is to arrive at a renewed understanding of humanity itself. The text affirms that imagination remains the last territory of freedom—not because it invents new worlds, but because it allows the rethinking of the one in which people live. The purpose of humanity, of culture, of fiction, of literature and of civilisation as a whole converges in a single task: to produce new, authentic humans. Even when existence unfolds within fictional worlds, metaphysical constructions or emerging metaverses, the task remains unchanged—to create persons capable of being truthful within the inevitable fictions that constitute human life.

The Straight Line of Life

'The truth is that we know so little about life that we do not really know what is good news and what is bad news. Life happens while you are busy making other plans.'
— Kurt Vonnegut

In his well-known lecture[65] on the shapes of stories, Kurt Vonnegut draws the emotional trajectory of Hamlet as a horizontal straight line. In this diagram there are no rises, no falls, no catharsis, no victory or defeat in a moral sense—only a steady movement from beginning to end. The irony is that this is precisely the line Vonnegut defines as 'the most truthful story ever told'. It presents life as it is experienced by most people: without dramatic turns, without stable interpretations, without clear labels of 'good' and 'evil'. Hamlet's life is not organised into dramatic arcs; every event remains indeterminate. His father's death is a tragedy, yet the ghost that explains it may be either a sign of justice or a deception. The killing of Polonius is horrific, but its consequences are ambiguous. The final duel can be read as liberation or as punishment. Shakespeare's tragedy refuses to turn existence into a plot; Vonnegut merely visualises this refusal. The straight line thus becomes an image of the existential vacuum—of that flat, almost invisible flow of time that modern humans desperately try to replace with forms, drama, and stories. From an early age people are trained to expect their biographies to arrange themselves as narratives, complete with obstacles, reversals, awakenings, and moral lessons. Hamlet exposes this illusion by presenting an existence that does not follow dramaturgical logic. The idea of 'development' is a product of desire, not a reflection of reality. Real life, as Vonnegut's line suggests, is continuity rather than plot. The straight line does not mean an absence of action, but an absence of extractable meaning from action. Hamlet constantly attempts to interpret events, to locate a moral axis, to find a point of orientation, yet every interpretation collapses. Every decision generates deeper uncertainty. This is the drama of human existence: not the lack of events, but the lack of a clear emotional geometry. Hamlet becomes an enlarged caricature of the contemporary subject—someone who feels that 'nothing is happening', or that whatever is happening cannot be arranged into a meaningful order. From this follows the power of the straight line: it reveals a psychological dependence on narrative. People cannot endure the flatness of everyday life, so they instinctively translate the even surface of time into arcs of destiny.

Religion is a narrative: creation, fall, redemption. History is a narrative: crises, rises, revolutions. News imitates dramatic structures: disaster–recovery, scandal–reform. Science is presented through the hero's journey: problem–breakthrough–salvation. All these forms soften the anxiety produced by the possibility that life has no plot. Yet the straight line remains the most accurate diagram of daily existence. The overwhelming majority of time unfolds through repetition: waking, work, screens, food, fatigue. This monotony is difficult to accept, so imagination bends it into curves. Love is framed as an odyssey, career as ascent, politics as battle. The social world rewards such autofictions; every social media profile is a miniature drama of peaks and collapses. In reality, life continues along a straight line, while dramaturgy remains its narrative overlay. This is why Vonnegut's line becomes threatening: it reveals that the story industries—media, politics, advertising, entertainment—function by refusing to accept the flatness of life. The economy of attention feeds on arcs, not planes. Without drama, markets falter; without narrative, politics loses force. Yet beneath all the turns, people continue to live along straight lines. Vonnegut sees here not tragedy but paradox: humans construct plots in order to escape the truth

[65] Case Western Reserve University (2016). Kurt Vonnegut Lecture. YouTube. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4_RUgnC1lm8.

that life may be without plot. Hamlet fails to find meaning because he expects meaning to be discovered rather than produced. His line reminds us that meaning is the result of storytelling. When the story ends, only the movement of time remains. The straight line is the primary form of life; all other arcs are its ornaments. Perhaps the most honest response is not to bend it further, but to acknowledge its nakedness—to accept that life is not necessarily a story, but a sequence of scenes experienced by a single consciousness. From that nakedness begins the freedom to invent one's own form.

The Curved Line of Drama

"Life is not a story. You go through things and you don't understand what they mean. It's only later that you find out what they were about. People want to believe that life has a structure. But it doesn't. We give it a structure so that we can endure it. Any attempt to tell the truth is a kind of failure, because the truth is bigger than anything we can write. Stories are a way of avoiding the truth."

— Charlie Kaufman, BAFTA Screenwriters' Lecture, 2011

In his lecture 'The Shapes of Stories', Kurt Vonnegut discovers that narratives can be mapped as emotional trajectories over time, revealing that what people call meaning is often nothing more than a curve imposed on experience to make suffering, luck, and coincidence bearable. Vonnegut discovers in Shakespearean tragedy not so much a plot as a diagram of human existence – flat, indeterminate, stripped of clear rises and falls. The straight line becomes a visualisation of an existential truth: people expect fate to have a shape, but more often it does not. It is precisely this idea that underpins the famous scene 'And why the fuck are you wasting my two precious hours with your movie!?' from the film Adaptation (2002), one of the most original metatexts about what it means to write a story and what it means to search for meaning. In the film, the characters merely resemble the director and screenwriter Charlie Kaufman and Robert McKee, one of the most influential screenwriting gurus. They are not documentary portraits but fictional doubles, created to stage an indirect debate about the essence of screenwriting craft. This is a clash between two worldviews: that of the straight line – life as stasis, hesitation, an ongoing 'nothing much happens' – and that of drama, which insists that without events there is no story, and without story there is no human being.

'Charlie Kaufman': *'What if a writer is trying to create a story in which not much happens? Where people don't change, don't have any revelations. They struggle, they're frustrated, and nothing gets resolved. More like the real world.'*

'Robert McKee': *'The real world? The real fucking world. First of all, if you write a script without conflict or crisis, you'll bore the audience to tears. Second — nothing happens in the world? Are you out of your mind? People are murdered every day. There's genocide, wars, corruption. Every fucking day somewhere in the world someone sacrifices their life to save another. Every fucking day someone somewhere makes a conscious decision to destroy another human being. People find love. People lose it. A child watches his mother beaten to death on the steps of a church. Someone starves. Someone betrays their best friend over a woman. If you can't find these things in life, then, my friend, you know nothing about life. And why the hell are you wasting my two precious hours with your movie? I get nothing out of it. Not one fucking thing.'*

‘Charlie Kaufman’: *‘Okay… thank you.’*

The scene begins with the insecure screenwriter posing a question that sounds like an echo of Hamlet’s ‘To be or not to be’. ‘What if someone wants to tell a story in which nothing happens?’ he asks. ‘Where people don’t change, don’t have revelations, remain disappointed — like in real life?’ This is a plea for the legitimisation of the straight line. A desire to justify existence without an arc. A creative version of existential paralysis. The seminar guru – a character inspired by McKee but transformed into a fictional caricature – responds with an outburst that shatters the idea of equivalence between ‘existence without plot’ and truth. His cry ‘The real fucking world?’ calls into question the very notion of a ‘reality without events’. The entire tirade is constructed as a catalogue of dramatic possibilities that reality offers every single day. The world is too intense to be reduced to a flat line. At this moment, the film stages a collision between two philosophies: one sees life as a flat field of hesitation, the other as a chaotic but unavoidable sequence of confrontations. Adaptation complicates this conflict by introducing the double Donald – Charlie’s brother, who effortlessly embraces all the rules that Charlie rejects. Donald accepts the formula, sells a script, achieves success. He embodies the dramatic curve; Charlie embodies the straight line. And yet the narrative demonstrates that the two cannot exist in complete separation. When Charlie finally begins to write, his life itself starts to resemble a film – pursuit, accident, death, despair. Adaptation thus visualises the paradox: every attempt to flee from drama inevitably generates its own dramatic contour. Narrative here appears not so much as artistic fabrication but as a form of survival: a way of imposing structure on chaos, of marking significance where the plane of time appears mercilessly smooth. At this point, a deeper metacommentary emerges. The media scenario and popular culture, in their attempt to ‘domesticate’ drama, produce script models that replace reality with structure. Audiences begin to live according to the arcs they expect to receive. Conflict becomes a necessity, catharsis a mandatory step, meaning a product that must be ‘delivered’. Drama becomes the norm, and flatness becomes unthinkable. And when someone asks about a story without events, the answer is the guru’s scream – not because it must be so, but because this is how we have learned to see the world. In the end, the scene from Adaptation returns us to the same place where Hamlet began: the human being oscillates between the straight line of life and the dramatic curves the mind draws in order to escape its emptiness. The truth likely lies between them – in the effort to acknowledge the flatness, while still finding within it a form that brings one closer to oneself.

The Cyberdrama of the Bookish Human

“The computer is the most powerful representational medium ever created, and it should be entrusted to the hands of storytellers.”
— Janet H. Murray

Hamlet on the Holodeck: The Future of Narrative in Cyberspace (1997) is a book[66] by Janet H. Murray that explores how digital technologies transform storytelling. Murray analyses hypertext literature, interactive cinema, early chatbots and video games in order to show how digital environments generate new forms of plot, participation and narrative structure. She formulates

[66] Murray, J.H. (1997). Hamlet on the Holodeck: The Future of Narrative in Cyberspace. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

four core properties of the digital medium — procedurality, participation, spatiality and encyclopaedic scope — and explains how these reshape the future of narrative. As early as 1997, Murray anticipates the emergence of new media genres, including MUD (Multi-User Dungeon) worlds, 3D interactivity, virtual drama and intelligent agents. The book was expanded in 2016, so that its very existence in two versions marks a transition between two centuries and even between two ways of thinking about media. The 2016 addition no longer speaks of 'the future of narrative' as a hypothesis, but describes it as a partially realised reality.

In the text, Hamlet functions as a metaphor for the supreme capacity of narrative to express the inner life of the human being, while the question 'Hamlet on the Holodeck?' asks whether future cyberdramas can capture the same truth about the human condition that Shakespeare renders through Hamlet's soliloquies. But what is the 'holodeck'? The holodeck is a fictional technology from Star Trek: The Next Generation, representing a fully immersive virtual environment — a room in which the computer generates simulations of places, people and events that can be experienced as reality. The user can enter, interact freely and participate in a narrative that responds to their choices. For Murray, the holodeck is a metaphor for the future of storytelling — a space in which the reader or player becomes an acting subject and the story unfolds in response to their actions. She calls it an 'optimistic technology for exploring the inner life', because it enables both external interaction and deep psychological engagement.

The book traces how early games such as Zork and experiments with hypertext point towards future forms of cyberdrama — interactive fictional universes that combine dramaturgy, simulation and choice. Murray argues that the digital medium will not destroy literature, but will extend its possibilities, just as cinema once extended the novel. The central message of the book is that there is no reason to fear change: virtual media, like the book and cinema before them, will become new forms of human imagination, provided that they are approached with critical awareness, ethics and creative responsibility. The birth of a new medium always carries a dual sensation — excitement and fear. Every technology that expands human capacities simultaneously unsettles them and threatens established understandings of what it means to be human. The boat, the automobile, the aeroplane — all are magical extensions of arms and legs; the telephone extends the voice; the book extends memory. The computer of the 1990s unites all these extensions, becoming a machine for travel, for communication across oceans, for storing and retrieving information — and at the same time controlling fighter jets and defeating chess grandmasters. It is hardly surprising that some perceive it as a playful omnipotent spirit, while others see it as Frankenstein's monster.

For Janet Murray, however, the computer gradually comes to resemble not an enemy, but the film camera of the 1890s or the video camera of the 1980s — a revolutionary medium that humanity is only beginning to learn how to use as a storyteller. The computer can be more than a calculating instrument. At the heart of the machine there may lie creativity. What do computer science and literature share? Imagine that all the books in the world have been digitised and can be freely searched, allowing even the theft of long-forgotten and weathered ideas. Literature is undoubtedly humanity's greatest product, but books without catalogues and indexes are merely piles of printed paper. The structural beauty of the literary work expresses a deep truth, yet traditional literature could not say everything that was new. Sometimes truth demands a new form, not merely new content. New technologies intuitively created something that would later be called 'hypertext', before the term itself was known. Literary theory had withdrawn into linguistic labyrinths, while pedagogy was turning into a festival of empty meaning. Students write better when they have something to say; they learn languages faster when they want to speak to someone. The new form of truth is knowledge as communication. Beyond being a calculating machine for percentages and dividends, the computer can be a space for adventure,

and programming a form of magic. The world of machines is not only models, algorithms and diagrams, but hypertexts, metaverses and interactivity. ‘Metaworlds’ — digital environments in which knowledge can be experienced, not merely read. Language-learning programmes that place learners in real environments — the streets of Rome or neighbourhoods of London. Certain kinds of knowledge live more fully in a digital environment than on paper. The computer does not destroy the book; it is its child — the offspring of five centuries of print culture. The idea of a computer-based literary form is realised in a technology that can make text, image and sound resonate in synchrony. Algorithms can place millions of works side by side, visualise structures that the book itself cannot.

The Future of Cybernarrative

“Stories are our equipment for life; they teach us how to interpret and experience the world.”
— Kenneth Burke

The book Hamlet on the Holodeck (1997) was written in an era of analogue television, printed newspapers and static web pages, when electronic mail still sounded like a plot device from a romantic comedy. And yet the book takes for granted the convergence of media and computer technologies—a process that has since become a global foundation of contemporary culture. The future of narrative in cyberspace is conceived there as a long-term question, extending across decades and even centuries: the formation of new artistic traditions, the emergence of new audiences, and the transformation of science-fiction interfaces into everyday instruments of storytelling. Just as the camera and the printing press once expanded the horizons of human expression, the computer carries its own unique potential for new narrative forms. What begins to take shape is the figure of the future storyteller as a ‘hacker-bard’, experimenting with digital forms—game designers, journalists, filmmakers, television producers, museum curators. Alongside this figure, a conceptual framework for the new landscape also emerges. Simulations, open game worlds, systems of automated storytelling and interactive television appear as extensions of an ancient human activity: narration itself. The computer does not replace storytelling; it expands its expressive repertoire.

In the 2016 foreword, Janet Murray dismisses claims that the digital environment destroys the silence and spiritual depth of reading as convenient rhetorical gestures—nostalgic, but ultimately unsustainable. One can read even the most elevated book superficially, just as one can think deeply in front of a screen. The internet has brought an unprecedented expansion of access to knowledge, along with new digital forms such as simulations, navigational structures and faceted search. These enable new modes of comparison, experimentation and thinking that resemble the complex logic of consciousness more closely than the linearity of the book. Another group of critics, drawn from postmodern theory, argued that the future of electronic literature lay in hypertext. Yet the book does not ask to be read as a late twentieth-century literary theory. It is a manifesto for aesthetic practice and therefore does not share the postmodern desire for endless problematisation. Its interest lies in the future rather than in the crisis of the sign—in the possibility that digital media might generate a more flexible and integrative way of thinking about human experience. Game Studies, also known as ludology (from *ludus*, ‘game’, and *-logia*, ‘study’), constitute the scholarly investigation of games, the act of play itself, and the cultures, communities and practices that form around them. This field within cultural studies examines all types of games across human history. Not all games are narratives, and no ‘narrative hegemony’ can be imposed on game formalism. The power of play is not a threat to

storytelling; it is part of the cultural logic from which storytelling itself emerges. Games, like novels and films, can be read as cultural artefacts saturated with meanings, emotions, identities and ideologies. Over time, the old divisions have gradually eroded. Defenders of print began publishing online, hypertext theorists embraced games, and former ludologists turned towards narrative.

Mastery of technology and even the most complex hardware is not sufficient if one does not also master narrative itself—that software of human emotion through which history preserves the names of its creators. Civilisation does not ultimately remember machines, but stories about how they were used and what traces they left on human lives. One may be a brilliant computer programmer, yet fail to inscribe one's name in history without telling a story, while others are remembered despite never having written a single line of code. In the twenty-first century, people want to create stories that can exist only in a digital environment—stories in which the reader is a participant and the structure is a living organism. Year after year, narratives become bolder, more skilful, more open in dialogue with the machine. Observing them, one senses the birth of a new kind of storyteller—half hacker, half bard—combining technical ingenuity with the ancient human impulse to give meaning to chaos. This is the future of cyberliterature: a form that will not replace the novel or the film, but will extend their capacity to suspend time, to pursue consciousness, to depict the chaos of society. The computer can continue the work of the book: to organise the world not through fixed pages, but through dynamic spaces in which knowledge unfolds as movement. In a time of historical transition, literature is as vital as information technology. Children grow up in a world where screens are as natural as books. Being at home in these environments, they expect the next wonder. How might this wonder be imagined? Janet Murray imagines cyberdrama: a new space born from the spirit of the hacker and the heart of the bard—a space worthy of the imagination that comes after us.

Hyper-Beauty, Cyber-Truth

"Technology is neither good nor bad; nor is it neutral."
— Melvin Kranzberg

The holodeck technology of Star Trek still appears distant, while the first digital games, labyrinths, and early websites only lightly touch the expressive potential of the new medium. According to Janet Murray, these early experiments awakened a new kind of desire—especially among the young—for stories one does not merely watch but enters: stories offering deeper immersion, a stronger sense of agency and choice, and prolonged inhabitation of a kaleidoscopic world. Even though the tools remain rudimentary, many people are already creating their own worlds in MUD environments or constructing levels for games with open architectures. For those who do not program, the preparation of digital text, sound, and video is becoming increasingly accessible through standard AI software. Website design gradually turns into an activity as routine as once was making a business card or a greeting card on a home computer. Anyone who masters keyboard and mouse can now create basic pages, links, and visual elements and release them into the network. The World Wide Web becomes a global autobiographical project—a gigantic illustrated magazine of personal stories and opinions. Independent digital authors use the web as a worldwide channel for 'underground' creativity: illustrated narratives, animations, hypertext novels, short digital films. Science fiction and fantasy remain powerful, but the mass of family albums, travel diaries, and visual autobiographies steadily pulls digital narrative toward the cultural centre rather than the periphery. At the same time, media conglomerates approach

digital space as a new distribution channel rather than a new art form. For them it is simply another ‘pipe’ carrying content to a new market. They move cautiously, most often attempting to ‘make film and television interactive’ without understanding what people actually seek in a digital environment. As a result, future forms of digital narrative will be shaped by the tension between two poles: small, agile experimenters accustomed to hypertext, procedural thinking, and virtual environments, and massive entertainment corporations with resources and mass audiences. Over the coming decades, a variety of formats can be expected, all searching for a balance between the pleasures of linear storytelling and the specific affordances of the digital medium. Viewing habits are changing: people watch a series while simultaneously writing in chats and forums, discussing characters, inventing alternative scenes, criticising screenwriters. Watching and participating slide into one another.

Alongside collective experiences, however, there will also be solitary ones—‘desktop’ digital worlds that one enters alone in order to become the protagonist. Such an environment may be based on a film, a novel, or a historical period, offering multiple scenarios, roles, and choices, and allowing replay until no corner remains unexplored. This form inherits the intimacy of the novel: immersion in an alternative ‘self’, without real-world consequences but with powerful inner transformations. All these variations—hyper-serial worlds, mobile films, role-playing universes, private desktop stories—can be gathered under the provisional name ‘cyberdrama’. This does not signify a new prefix added to the old novel or film, but a gradual rebirth of the very idea of narrative within a digital environment. At first, children and young people will be most strongly drawn to it, as they naturally move from shooters and arcades toward more complex role-playing forms. Over time, however, the format itself will mature; users accustomed to participation rather than observation will demand subtler, more intelligent stories worthy of serious experience and reflection. At a certain point, the medium that today appears intrusive and conspicuous will begin to ‘melt away’. People will stop asking whether they are interacting with a real actor, another participant, or a programmed agent; whether the environment is a filmed set or generated graphics; whether it is delivered by cable or wireless network. Attention will return to where it has always resided in powerful stories—to the narrative itself, to the scene, to moral choice, to the human encounter. And when one forgets the medium and simply lives within the fictional reality, without questioning how it is made, then—even without replicators or perfect holograms—one will find oneself at home on the holodeck.

In this new era, the hero of the media scenario will be at once an omnipotent participant and the most vulnerable inhabitant of cyberdrama—a person who traverses infinite digital universes yet must alone bear the weight of their moral choices. Within this magnificent but controllable cosmos, however, the danger of loneliness will always lurk: no one will ever be entirely certain whether they are facing another human being or an impersonal algorithm, and this uncertainty will turn authenticity into the rarest virtue of future storytelling. According to Zygmunt Bauman, we live in an age of the endless ‘self’, continuously projected outward and perpetually seeking recognition it no longer knows how to trust. Hyper-beauty and cyber-truth mark the moment when digital narrative ceases to imitate the world and begins to rethink it from within—as a mirror that no longer reflects, but creates.

Hamlet and Vedbal in the New Era

'The word is a weapon. Whoever masters it can destroy and can build.'
— Hristo Smirnenski "Vedbal"

'There is nothing either good or bad, but thinking makes it so.'
— William Shakespeare, Hamlet, Act II, Scene II

Hristo Smirnenski enters literature through journalism, and journalism through language. As a refugee child distributing newspapers on the streets of Sofia, he discovers early on that words are not ornament but action: they can gather crowds, change moods, accelerate the rhythm of the city. Between this early 'reportage' and the mature poet stands the figure of Vedbal—the humorist who turns language into a mobile instrument of social intervention. This trajectory is charged with energy, transformation, and initiative—everything that is missing from the straight line of Hamlet's existence as imagined by Vonnegut.

Vedbal masters the most important rule of public speech: to change the world, one must find the exact distance to the listener's ear. The feuilleton, the epigram, the satirical sketch—published in 'K'vo da e', 'Bulgaran', and 'Laughter and Tears'—are not an escape from seriousness, but a form of attack. Laughter disarms power, renders injustice visible, strips away masks. The short, ironic pseudonym Vedbal sounds like an alarm: the text does not remain on the page, but continues to live in everyday dialogue, in slogans, in remarks exchanged on Sofia's trams. The journalism in which he grows is a stage, not a podium; movement, not sermon. In Smirnenski, this intuition becomes a poetic position. 'The Tale of the Ladder' is a diagram of substitution—how a person trades hearing, sight, heart, and memory for an illusory ascent. This is not merely a moral allegory, but a manual of professional hygiene for words. 'Guard your hearing' means: hear the pain beneath the anthem. 'Guard your eyes': see the wound behind the ceremony. 'Guard your memory': do not forget where you come from and for whom you speak. 'Guard your heart': do not turn human tragedy into a convenient effect.

Here the contrast with Hamlet becomes decisive. In Vonnegut's graph, the life of the Danish prince is a straight line—events follow one another but do not yield secure meaning. Everything moves in the shadow of 'perhaps'. Hamlet is a grammar of indecision: he hesitates, interprets, doubts witnesses, signs, himself. In Smirnenski, language does not hesitate but acts. It does not remain in the fog of interpretation, but enters the situation and changes it. If Hamlet is 'thinking to the point of paralysis', Vedbal and Smirnenski are 'thinking through movement'. This does not mean that Smirnenski is free of doubt. On the contrary—his poetry often radiates pain, a sense of misery, a gap between dream and reality. But he transforms doubt into impulse, not paralysis. The rhythm of the city, the deadline of the newspaper, the insistence of the street teach him to think scenically: to arrange scenes, shift focus, create montage. The newspaper text becomes direction; the satirical couplet, a striking shot; the poem, a wide-angle view of the social landscape. This is his 'anti-Hamlet' method: composition serves not contemplation, but the community. Language for him is neither slogan nor closed canon. It is a living house that comes alive only when its entrance is open. In the satirical texts this house is noisy, overcrowded with voices. In the poetry it is wide, permeable, filled with light and compassion. The idea of 'language as an empty house that must be inhabited' is among the most precise summaries of Smirnenski: speech has meaning only when it reaches the other.

From here emerges the difference between Hamlet's literary model and Vedbal's journalistic one. Hamlet is fixed in doubt; Vedbal in intervention. Hamlet asks what events mean; Smirnenski asks what must be done. Vonnegut's straight line marks the fear of banality—of life without form. Smirnenski's language is the answer: form can be created through action, through speech,

through solidarity. This is why the figure of Vedbal remains especially valuable. It reminds us that humour and poetry are not escapes from reality, but ways of naming it, gathering it, addressing it. In a world where Hamletian indecision is often presented as intellectual virtue, Smirnenski proposes another model: a language that does not fear becoming movement, becoming stage, becoming encounter. In this sense he is anti-Hamlet—not because he does not know pain, but because he refuses to submit to it. Language, Smirnenski insists, is alive only if it reaches the other. And perhaps this is the most important lesson in the contrast between Hamlet and Vedbal: when life collapses into a straight line, words can restore its depth.

The Journalist of the Twenty-First Century

'Journalism allows its readers to witness history; fiction allows them to live it.'
— John Hersey

In the book[67] Journalism of the Twenty-First Century, the profession is examined as a field in collapse and reinvention, yet behind the structures, platforms, and models lies a simpler truth: journalism is not an institution, a market, or a 'media system', but an action performed by a concrete human being. All the crises of the system condense into a single figure—the journalist who, in the twenty-first century, must make moral decisions under conditions of permanent uncertainty. If the previous century could rely on newsrooms as stable apparatuses, today it is the individual author who becomes the site where it is decided whether a news item will be testimony or manipulation, whether language will serve the community or power.

The digital revolution has made the journalist simultaneously freer and more vulnerable. Algorithms and platforms have transformed the environment, but the moral choice—what to publish, how to judge a fact, how to endure pressure—remains personal. In a world of endless information flows, the journalist can no longer hide behind an 'editorial line', because their name, face, and voice are visible in social networks, and every word is subject to public contestation. Professional identity is no longer shielded by institutional walls; the journalist is exposed as an autonomous participant in public life. This exposure brings new responsibilities. The twentieth-century model, grounded in objectivist myths—the 'view from nowhere', the 'transparent observer', the 'impartial witness'—has collapsed. In the digital environment, the journalist cannot simply present themselves as a neutral apparatus; audiences expect sincerity, argument, and position, but also honesty about one's own limitations. Objectivity is no longer a role but a practice: a sustained effort toward accuracy, verification, openness, and self-restraint. In this sense, the journalist of the twenty-first century is less a 'figure of authority' and more a 'figure of personal responsibility'.

The journalist's working process has also changed beyond recognition. Today, the journalist is writer, photographer, camera operator, producer, editor, social media manager, and often their own publicist. In this single figure collide the contradictions of the age: the desire for high-quality, verified information and the demand for rapid content production; the pursuit of independence and dependence on algorithms that measure value through clicks and views. The individual stands between two systems—the system of truth and the system of visibility—and must choose daily which one to serve. The journalist of the twenty-first century operates under constant moral friction. Advertising models erode the boundary between editorial and sponsored content; the PR industry offers ready-made 'stories'; political pressure disguises itself as

[67] Hardy, J. (2021). Journalism in the 21st Century. Oxford University Press.

‘communication’; corporate interests impose constraints; online audiences punish complexity and reward sensation. In such an environment, every publication is a decision. Should one use fast, unverified information? Should one accept an ‘exclusive’ that clearly serves someone’s interest? Should a headline be distorted to retain attention? Professional ethics no longer have a collective form; they reside in the journalist’s private ‘no’.

At the same time, the public sphere has filled with voices that challenge the legitimacy of professionals. The smartphone has turned every witness into a potential chronicler, and social networks into mediators of publicity. Yet however valuable these new sources may be, they do not eliminate the role of the journalist as a figure capable of connecting facts, verifying claims, placing events in context, and confronting power. The difference between reporting and noise is that reporting carries responsibility. And responsibility is personal, unavoidable, and non-transferable. Thus, the key change of the twenty-first century is not the destruction of journalism, but the rewriting of the journalist’s role. The journalist is no longer a gatekeeper—there are no gates. Not the voice of the people—the people speak for themselves. Not an ‘objective guarantor’—objectivity is contested in real time. The journalist is something more modest and more difficult: a person who works with words to create space for meaning in an environment that produces noise; a person who preserves their hearing in order to distinguish fact from falsehood; a person who arranges scenes so that society can see itself without self-deception.

The journalist of the twenty-first century is a figure in a process of continuous self-discovery. Their strength is not institutional but moral; it does not come from circulation figures but from the capacity to be present; it is not measured in views but in the degree of honesty one can endure. In a fragmented, digital, and often hostile world, the journalist remains the last living knot between events and public meaning. And precisely because the world of news is disintegrating, the figure of the journalist is more necessary than ever—not as a hero, but as a human being who protects language from becoming an instrument of forgetting. The journalist of the twenty-first century is not called to be a fictional person who fabricates human fictions, but an authentic person who preserves their truthfulness even when the surrounding world demands convenient and well-paid stories. The most interesting element of the media scenario is the emotional arc of the protagonist, but the most important is the character of the author. The journalist is called to unite both roles.

‘All I ever wanted was to go there, see what was happening, and tell the truth to people.’
— Martha Ellis Gellhorn (1908–1998), American writer and journalist, war correspondent who covered most of the major armed conflicts from the late 1930s to the 1980s.

Epilogue

This book is not written to train future specialists in how to manipulate the masses, predict the future, instruct society, or point fingers at the mistakes of the past. It is not a manual for PR professionals, journalists, or aspiring experts in influence. It is an attempt to understand what happens to the human being in an environment where narratives are no longer lines but scenarios; where they do not unfold before one’s eyes but absorb the individual entirely. And what happens to ‘us’—insofar as such a ‘we’ can exist at all in an age of disintegrating communities and hyper-produced identities. For anyone who speaks publicly, sooner or later arrives at the word ‘we’. This word is the most seductive and the most dangerous in the media vocabulary. In its Proto-Slavic root, ‘ve’ means only ‘the two of us’—not a people, not a party, not a nation, not

‘everyone’ (PIE *we-, Sanskrit ‘vayam’, Old Persian ‘vayam’, Hittite ‘wesh’ ‘we’, Church Slavonic ‘ve’ ‘we two’). Every broader ‘we’ is already an extension, a belief, an abstraction, a metaphor—and sometimes an illusion. The excessive use of ‘we’ in politics, media, and science gives rise to the phenomenon known as early as the eighteenth century as ‘wegotism’: the over-inclusion of the reader within the speaker’s circle, the pretence that everyone thinks, feels, and believes the same way. The central danger of the media scenario lies precisely here: not in manipulation, but in ‘seduction through belonging’. The ‘I’ approaches the reader, touches them, inscribes them into its own perspective, and then suddenly withdraws back into distance. An ‘I’ that both invites and refuses; a ‘we’ that both unites and erases differences; a narrator who alternates between the role of protagonist and that of a cold observer. In this game of approach and retreat, the power of the first person is born—and its poison. The journalist of the twenty-first century can no longer ignore this dynamic. Their primary task is no longer ‘to tell the truth’, because truth itself dissolves at the entrance to every network; nor is it ‘to educate’, because audiences often know more about their own lived experience; nor is it ‘to protect society’, because society has fragmented into countless small ‘we’s. The first task of the ‘new journalist’—the digital bard—is to know who they are, where they stand, from which position they speak, and which community they represent, even if that community is the minimal ‘we two’: the speaker and the addressee. Here Kurt Vonnegut becomes especially important. His ‘curve’—that famous graphic model of rises and falls—is not merely a tool of plot. It is a diagram of human vulnerability. Every narrative, even the smallest one, is a change over time: a point that rises or falls according to the hopes, fears, and moral choices of the narrator. In the digital era, this curve is no longer linear, no longer individual, no longer the property of the author alone. It fragments into multiple micro-arcs drawn simultaneously by different participants—journalists, algorithms, users, trolls, bots. No one holds the ‘pen’ alone. That is why the media scenario of the new age cannot be studied merely as a technique. It must be understood as an environment in which people live, construct identities, lose orientation, and seek belonging. This book does not teach how to write a scenario; it teaches how to recognise when you are already inside a scenario you did not write. How to become aware of the role you are playing without intending to. How to find your place on a stage prepared by someone else. And most importantly—how not to lose your moral compass. Because the greatest danger is not lies, not propaganda, not manipulation, but cynicism: the moment when one begins to believe that words mean nothing and that ‘we’ is merely a convenient rhetorical device for binding an audience together. The media scenario of the future will be neither utopian nor post-historical, post-truth, or dystopian. It will be pluralist. Multiple realities will unfold simultaneously, each with its own logic of participation. The journalist will be neither director nor mere witness, but a mediator between versions of the world. And they will remain the only one who must remember that behind every ‘we’ stands a human being, not a crowd; a relationship, not a demographic; a personal choice, not a collective destiny. The paradox of our time is that the more technologies allow us to speak to everyone, the greater becomes the responsibility for how we construct the communities we summon with our words. Every use of ‘we’ is both a promise and a risk. That is why this epilogue is an invitation to sobriety: before creating a ‘we’, one must know what kind of character one is; before writing a scenario, one must realise in what genre of scenario one is already participating; before becoming a journalist, one must be prepared to stand behind one’s words as a human being. Because at the end of every media narrative, game, or scenario—beyond cameras, networks, algorithms, and illusions—there remains only one real ‘we’: the fragile, human, uncertain, unrepeatable ‘we two’ that makes storytelling possible. And only through it can a story be moral, and a journalist free.

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